THE ACCURSED LAND

OR

FIRST STEPS ON THE WATER-WAY OF EDOM

BY LIEUT-COLONEL H·E·COLVILE.

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THE ACCURSED LAND;

OR,

FIRST STEPS ON THE WATER-WAY OF EDOM.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

With Map and Illustrations, 12s. 6d.

A RIDE IN PETTICOATS AND SLIPPERS.

LONDON: SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, AND RIVINGTON,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

NAJM

Etched by the Hon. K. Russell.

THE ACCURSED LAND;

OR,

FIRST STEPS ON THE WATER-WAY OF EDOM.

BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL H. E. COLVILE,

Grenadier Guards.

AUTHOR OF "A RIDE IN PETTICOATS AND SLIPPERS."

London:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1884.

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LONDON:
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ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

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THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

PREFACE.

This book was written against time. On the 19th of January I left Port Said for England, on the 30th of January I landed at Plymouth, and on the 15th of February I started for the Soudan campaign, leaving my manuscript in the hands of a friend, who not only volunteered to undertake all the business transactions with my publishers, but that most ungrateful of all tasks, the correction of another man's "proofs."

Perhaps it may be said, under the circumstances, it would have been better to have left the book unwritten; but at the time I undertook my journey there was so little accurate information to be obtained about

the Arabah, that I was in hope that my mite would be acceptable even if I had to present it in rather an unpolished state.

It will be noticed that I have made some concession to those critics who objected to my phonetic spelling in "A Ride in Petticoats and Slippers;" I have even gone so far as to meet half-way the gentleman who objected to my spelling of "*Wizeer*," by representing the Arabic "yā" by *î* instead of *ee*. He would have liked me to write Vizir, but even to please him I cannot represent "waw" by a *v*, and write about Vadys and Bedvins. By the way, I wonder if the person who is responsible for our pronunciation of Oriental names hailed from Whitechapel; such words as *vizir* for *wizir*, *caravan* for *karawan*, and *'Ind* for *Hind* rather suggest it. I must also refuse to follow in the footsteps of the unfortunate Frenchman, who, having no *w* in his alphabet, is obliged to write Ouady and Bedouin.

In conclusion, let me here offer my best

thanks to many kind friends without whose assistance I could never have undertaken the journey, but who will probably accept my thanks the more readily if I do not drag their names into print. With my fellow-traveller, Captain Peacocke, the case is different; his name appears so often in these pages that I need have no hesitation in expressing my gratitude to him in this place. Not only did his companionship convert what might have been a tedious journey into a pleasant trip, but his clear head, his ready resource, and his great powers of work, made it possible to make, and make thoroughly, a survey which alone, or with a less competent or energetic companion, might never have been completed at all.

My servant Cash, by his readiness and energy, also contributed most materially to the success of the expedition, and to him my best thanks are due. To Messrs. Thomas Cook and Sons I must also offer my word of thanks for their readiness to meet my views,

and their admirable arrangements by which the discomforts of a ten days' journey across a waterless desert were so completely annulled.

SS. *Northumbria*, off Suakim,
Feb. 26*th*, 1884.

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THE ACCURSED LAND;

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

I HAD been nearly six weeks in England, and was getting rather bored with myself. Even an early parade in the park had failed to raise my spirits. Parade over, I changed and strolled towards the Guards' Club.

"Some letters for you, sir."

Of course! Why had not I gone to the Travellers', where no one ever wrote to me?

"Bunion and Sons are surprised—"

"Lady Jones at home."

"Dear sir, I am directed by the Palestine Channel Syndicate"—"The Palestine Channel Syndicate," I muttered; "how on earth can I owe them anything? Well, I sup-

pose I may as well read it"—"Dear sir, I am requested by the Palestine Channel Syndicate . . . to write and ask if you would feel disposed to undertake the preliminary examination of the proposed line of canal from the south end of the Dead Sea, to the head of the Gulf of Akabah."

A very few minutes had elapsed before "offer accepted" was whizzing through the wires.

A few days afterwards I attended a meeting of the board of directors, and, for the first time, heard some details about the scheme in which I had so suddenly become interested.

In the year 1855 the late Captain William Allen, R.N., published a book called "The Dead Sea, a New Route to India;" and laid before the government a project for a ship-canal through the Jordan Valley. The project was not accepted, nor, as far as I can gather, even seriously entertained, and for some twenty-five years no thought appears to have been given to the subject. Captain Allen's idea of a ship-canal to the East was, however, carried out, by M. de

Lesseps, in the Isthmus of Suez, and for some years we had remained contented with that rather uncertain means of communication with our Indian possessions. In 1882 events occurred which proved how easily that route might be stopped, while the fast-increasing traffic, and consequent increasing blocks, combined with the rapacity of the French company, were beginning to disgust British shipowners. Under these circumstances it was proposed to make a second canal through the isthmus, with British capital, and under British control. Political reasons, however, interfering with the scheme, it had to be abandoned.[1]

Just then somebody remembered Captain Allen and his long-forgotten scheme for a canal through the Dead Sea, and the Palestine Channel Syndicate was formed for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was practicable, and I had the honour of being chosen to carry out the investigation.

Captain Allen's scheme, based on the

[1] I am, of course, speaking of the state of the case in the summer of 1883.

known depression, below the sea-level, of the Jordan Valley, had only one weak point—the uncertainty as to the level of the Wady el Arabah. Many travellers had traversed this valley, all claiming to have made careful surveys yet none of them could agree as to the height of the watershed. Burckhardt, who traversed the Wady in 1812, described the watershed as being 1000 feet lower than the eastern desert, and declared his belief that the valley was the ancient course of the Jordan. Laborde, 1830, also marks it in his map "*ancien cours du Jordain*," and gives no indication whatever of a watershed. The Comte de Birtou gives it at 528 feet, but unfortunately his thermometer having been broken, he had to base his calculations on some rough boiling-point observation. Dr. Schubert, again, who appears to have been a careful observer, gives 465 Paris feet as the height of his encampment, at a distance of a day and a half from Akabah, and this point in Captain Allen's time was usually received as the watershed, yet there was not a particle of evidence to prove it; on the

contrary Schubert's own statements appeared to prove that this was a regular halting-place of the caravans, placed high up on the hill-side on account of the pasturage which could be obtained there. Then came the Duc de Luynes and Lieutenant de Vignes, who, following the well-established custom, proceeded to prove that all their predecessors were at fault, and assigned a height of 240 metres, or 787 feet, to the watershed.

Thus of the five scientific travellers who had traversed this valley no two could agree as to the height of the water-parting, and some of them even ignored its existence. It followed, therefore, that four of them must be wrong, and the odds were four to one against any one of them being right.

On being asked what sort of party I should like to take with me, I said that I should like a naval officer, a Royal Engineer officer, and six sappers, or sailors; and this being agreed to, I was told to make my own arrangements, collect my men, and buy the necessary instruments. It was decided, however, that before making the survey it would

be necessary to obtain the permission of the Porte, and a distinguished member of the board of directors consented to go himself to Constantinople to obtain the concession.

Until the consent was obtained nothing could be done, and I was quietly resting on my oars, when I happened one evening to take up the *Globe*, and read that the Porte had refused permission for the survey to be made. I dare say it was very wrong of me, but I felt rather pleased. If the Sultan had agreed to the survey he would probably have thought it necessary to send an escort, and I knew that would mean travelling about ten miles a day, and sitting up all night talking to the officer in command, and doing no work. Now I was free of all official worry and assistance, and was free to do things my own way; rather more free than I had bargained for. Having asked leave to make the survey, and having had that leave refused, the syndicate felt that they could not now very well send an expedition in direct opposition to the Sultan's wishes.

I fortunately, having asked nobody's leave, was untroubled by scruples of this sort, and thought that having made all my arrangements for the journey I might as well carry them out. This I was better enabled to do by the handsome *solatium* which was voted to soothe my disappointment at the collapse of the expedition.

Of course things had to be begun again on a much smaller scale. To begin with, the party had necessarily to be very much reduced. The Porte, I was told, had not only refused leave for the survey to be made, but had taken precautions to prevent it. A smart man had been sent to Hebron to look out for any party which might turn up, and the Governor of Jerusalem was also on the look-out. Under these circumstances I thought that the smaller the party the better.

Another good reason for reducing the size of the party lay in the fact that hardly any one cared to join it. Getting well paid for making a survey, with plenty of assistance and all comforts, was one thing, but sneak-

ing over the ground, doing double work, and getting no pay, was another. I was fortunate enough to find, in Captain Peacocke of the Royal Engineers, a man whom these conditions suited, and it was at last arranged that the party should consist of Peacocke and myself, and Cash, my servant.

I then put myself in the hands of Mr. Cook, of excursion fame, asking him to order transport for Mr. Cash at Suez, and for Colonel Colvile in Palestine. The Palestine order being of course only intended to put the Turks on the wrong scent.

Our party arranged, and the transport in Cook's hands, I had nothing more to think of but the instruments. The glorious uncertainty which existed as to my reception in the Wady el Arabah made this a matter of some difficulty. My original intention had been to run a chain of levels up the valley, make a careful survey, and take frequent observations for latitude and longitude, getting my time from Akabah by heliograph for the latter. With such a reduced party it would obviously be impossible now to estab-

lish a chain of heliograph stations, but I had still some hopes of being able to carry on the levelling. Even that, however, seemed very doubtful; it seemed doubtful even whether I should be able to do more than make a flying survey with an aneroid and a pocket sextant.

"The nearest telegraph station is at Hebron," wrote a gentleman from Syria, "and it will take fourteen days for any news of the expedition to reach the Sultan; in these fourteen days the survey can be made."

I therefore settled to take instruments to meet three contingencies.

1st. For the event of my meeting with no opposition: a theodolite and levelling staves, a plane table, and an 8″ sextant and artificial horizon.

2nd. In case I was allowed up the valley without opposition, but should find it impossible to make a regular survey: two cavalry sketching-boards, a boiling-point apparatus, three 4″ aneroids, an eye-level, and a mercurial barometer to leave at Akabah. The sextant and artificial horizon

would also have been used at night in this contingency.

3rd. In the event of my not being allowed up the valley at all, and being forced to make a dash for the watershed: a pocket sextant, a Captain George's artificial horizon, and a $2\frac{1}{2}''$ aneroid. I also took one of Brock's "explorers' watches," an instrument which I can thoroughly recommend for this sort of work.

The presents were the next things to be thought of, and I had some difficulty in deciding on what to buy for this purpose. My chief experiences hitherto had been amongst Moors and Zulus; they both like presents, though of course not the same kind, but I did not know whether the Bedwin of Syria might not have been brought too much in contact with civilization to care about anything but money. Remembering, however, that people in civilized England are not yet above taking presents in kind, I thought that there would be no harm in buying a few things for the Bedwin, especially as presents generally go farther than their value in money. I once had the good fortune to find

myself in a place where *Tändstickor* match-boxes were more valued than half-crowns, and even in Morocco many people who would not say thank-you for a sovereign, would do a good deal for a sixpenny tobacco pouch. Watches, clocks, purses, tobacco pouches, and knives, and musical boxes, I had found most useful in Morocco, and thinking that the Bedwin would probably like much the same class of things I bought a number of these articles, but, as it turned out, with the exception of the knives and tobacco pouches, they were not much appreciated. As far as my experience goes, the Bedwin only care for three things: money, weapons, and tobacco; and they seem to appreciate all three simply with regard to quantity. Three five-franc pieces are more acceptable than a sovereign, a big pistol which will not go off is more prized than a small one which will, and a pound of anything which will burn in a pipe, than an ounce of the best tobacco which one can buy.

Having made my arrangements, there was nothing to be done but sit still and pretend

that I was not going. If the Turks really intended to stop me, it would have added immensely to my difficulties if any notice of my intentions had got into the papers. Of course a certain number of people had to be let into the secret, and very well they kept it, for which I hope they will accept my best thanks.

A few days before I started I saw in the papers that a geological expedition, under Professor Hull, had started for the Arabah, and were to be accompanied by an Egyptian escort. After the distinct refusal which the Porte had given to the request of the Syndicate, this seemed strange news, but it was none the less good. If Professor Hull could go up the Arabah, I felt quite certain that I could do the same, and if Professor Hull were prevented from going, I hoped that in the excitement which his large party would cause I might slip by unobserved.

CHAPTER II.

Off—Inquiring minds—"Meeting the sun"—A British protectorate—*Vive le règlement*—Najm—Ayoun Musa—Wanted a weight-carrier—Food, water, and *impedimenta*—A martyr to science—The first pot—Desolation *in excelsis*.

At 10 a.m. on the morning of Nov. 8th, 1883, I left Victoria Station, accompanied by my servant, Cash, and burdened with a truck-load of instruments. Stopping a night in Milan, I found myself on the evening of the 11th on board the P. and O. SS. *Mongolia*, at Brindisi.

"Any news?" I heard out of the darkness.

"No," I said, and found that the question had come from Peacocke, who had joined the ship at Venice.

"Lost any of the instruments?" next came out simultaneously from both of us,

and having satisfied ourselves on this point, we began to congratulate ourselves on the fact that he had found no old friends on board, and that I had brought none with me in the train. Next morning proved that my self-congratulations had been rather premature, but I managed to keep my secret, at the expense, I fear, of being thought singularly churlish and uncommunicative. I found strangers, however, quite as eager for information about my movements as friends. Why, I am sure I cannot tell. I did not care where they had come from, where they were going to, or what their grandmother's maiden name was; and why an unobtrusive sort of person like myself, with long hair and a five-days' beard should have excited so much curiosity, is a mystery only known to the inquirers.

Having hitherto lead a simple sort of life, with but little to conceal, the extraordinary thirst for information of my fellow-creatures had so far never been brought prominently before my notice; now it made my life a burden to me. The bolder spirits would

come out with their "What are you going to do?" without the slightest provocation or prelude. The more timid ones would prologue the agony by confidences about their prospects at Bunkumpore; but the result was always the same. I found that giving the conversation some such turn as this generally concentrated the inquirer's thoughts inwards:—

Passenger: "Good morning."

Author: "Morning."

Passenger: "Nice breeze here."

Author: "Yes."

Passenger: "It will be different when we get the other side."

Author: "Yes."

Passenger: "You are going on, I suppose?"

Author: "No, I am not."

Passenger: "Indeed! *I*'m going to Wakpurnuggar."

Author: "Wakpurnuggar! are you? Ever been there before?"

Passenger: "No."

Author (*thoughtfully*): "Wakpurnuggar!

why that is the place where poor Brown died of fever. Wonderfully strong fellow, Brown; just your build."

The conversation turns on the advantages and disadvantages of quinine, tobacco, alcohol and mosquito curtains.

It had struck me that "meeting the sun," would have been an appropriate and poetical title for this chapter. Its appropriateness was rather marred by the fact that I had left murky London in bright sunshine, carried sunshine with me during the whole journey, and only lost it in a thick fog off Port Said.

"Can you direct me to any of Mr. Cash's party?" I heard at my elbow soon after we took up our moorings. The speaker was Mr. Pagnol, Cook's agent, and to him I introduced myself as a member of that distinguished band. The camels, he said, were at Ayoun Musa, on the Asiatic shore of the Gulf of Suez, and everything was ready for a start whenever and for wherever I wished. I had intended to go to Suez by P. and O., but the captain of the *Hydaspes*, which was going on, refused the honour of

our company on the ground that his ship was full (as a mere matter of fact it was not), so I had to content myself with sending on my baggage, in charge of Cash, to whom they would only give a deck passage. I had to pass the rest of the day and night at Port Said, and go on to Ismailia in the Canal Company's launch in the morning—seven hours between mudbanks.

On the voyage we had a touching instance of the confidence which the unsophisticated native places in British honour and manhood. Peacocke and I had been watching for some time, from the roof of the deck-house, a pretty little romp between an amorous Frenchman, assisted by the man at the wheel, and a fat Arab girl. Suddenly the fun seemed to get a little too fast for the young lady's taste, for, breaking away from her playmate, she "flopped" down between us, and seizing us, in turn, convulsively by the legs, began to cry.

"For goodness' sake, remember that you are a scientific explorer," I said to Peacocke; "and do not let Pagnol see you like that."

"I wonder if Cleopatra for whom Antony risked his soul was anything like this," he mournfully replied, as the mass of blubber fondled him more lovingly than ever.

Exhortations and moralizings were equally useless, for until we stopped at the Kantara Buffet that fat girl maintained that Egypt and the Egyptians were (or ought to be) under a British protectorate, and steadily held her position, to the great delight of the amorous Frenchman, assisted by the man at the wheel.

Egyptian trains are not noted for their punctuality, but we had the good luck to travel with the traffic inspector, who kept things up to the mark, and we arrived at Suez really within a few minutes of our proper time.

Here I found that the *Hydaspes* with my luggage had not yet arrived, having been stopped by a homeward-bound steamer, which had been allowed to enter the canal at the last moment. It is by this strict attention to the letter of the *règlement* that the French authorities are making them-

selves and their canal so unpopular. Here was a case in which a little relaxation of the strict letter of the law might surely have been allowed. Within half an hour of sunset the *Hydaspes* and another mail steamer find themselves within easy reach of Suez, yet because a homeward-bound steamer happens to arrive at the Suez station perhaps a minute before the *Hydaspes* reaches the next one, the homeward-bounder is let in, although she cannot possibly proceed more than two miles on her way, and the mail steamers are delayed till next morning; entailing not only great loss of time and money to the companies, but inconvenience to the public.

I was on board the *Hydaspes* early next morning, and sent off my baggage and instruments direct to my camp on the Asiatic shore, thus avoiding all observation and comment at Suez, where I passed for a simple young gentleman on a visit to the sacred localities of Mount Sinai. There was comment and observation enough on board, however, and my friends of the *Mongolia*

seemed much puzzled to see their long-haired fellow-passenger now sporting the neatest of Newgate clips, and handing over the side sextants, levelling staves and such like to a formidable-looking old Syrian in long boots and a big whip; and noticing that the boat with the said instruments instead of going to Suez sailed off towards the uninhabited south-east. I knew that they were not going to land, however, so they were at liberty to think what they pleased.

The big-booted old Syrian was my dragoman, Najm abu Kathir (the Star, the Father of Much), who, in spite of the bigness of his whip, his boots, and his nose, was a most amiable old thing, with a fixed idea that the European stomach requires replenishing every two hours, and is incapable of assimilating any nourishment which has not been served on a white tablecloth and eaten with a silver fork. He was a very intelligent, well-educated man, and when I say that he had not only written a book, but actually got somebody to buy it, the reader will, I know,

at once concede that he must have been a very superior person.

Two hours' sail in a small boat brought us opposite the quarantine station at Ayoun Musa (Moses' Wells), and a bump which sent us all on to our noses announced that the sea voyage was over. The tide was falling fast, and the boatmen were anxious to get rid of us as soon as possible, before the boat stuck for good, so overboard they jumped the moment she struck, and, whipping us on to their shoulders, waded off towards the shore. I say "us," and so far as Cash, Najm, and myself were concerned, this is strictly correct, but Peacocke was not quite so easy to flick about, walking as he did 14 st. 7 lbs., and looking it, and there was some little debate among the men as to which of them should have the honour of carrying him. I was the first ashore, and so had a chance of enjoying the sight. First came Najm and his fiery steed. Two bare legs splashing through the water and two big boots sticking out at right angles to them; one big blue body with one bearded,

rugged, be-fezzed head, and one funny old wizened face, peeping out of a yellow kaffeyeh, growing somewhere out of the shoulders of the blue body, a Remington carbine sticking up above everything, and the big rhinoceros-hide whip hanging down at the side. Next came Cash, balanced on a small Egyptian's shoulders, carrying the camera which I would have given anything to have had with me, and speculating on which of three events was most likely to come off; that he should drop the camera and get blown up by me, that he should tumble off and get wet and blown up too, or that the Egyptian should tumble down, and that he should get wet, blown up, and slain as the cause of the disaster. In the rear was the most unfortunate person to whom the lot of carrying Peacocke had fallen. Manfully his two thin legs struggled through the waves and his weak neck tried to resist the pressure of Peacocke's thighs, and for 150 yards all went well, then gradually the pace got slower, the knees more shaky and the head more bowed, and there was a sudden collapse, and

Peacocke touched Asiatic sand beneath two feet of Asiatic water.

Our boat had been seen from the camp, and the camels had been sent down to meet us. "Khhhhh!" said their drivers as we neared them, and caught hold of their beasts by the nose, and down dropped the camels on their knees in a row.

"Yallah!" I said as I mounted, and "Artini cigarra," said the driver, to which I replied, "Cigarra—mafeesh," for the first time out of many hundreds on which this same request was made.

Once fairly landed on the Asiatic shore, and cut off from communication with the outer world, I could unburden my mind to Najm, and announce to that worthy that the Wady el Arabah was my destination.

"Where you order, sir, I go," was his only reply, which at once prepossessed me greatly in his favour, and I found throughout the whole journey that he was as good as his word.

We had come prepared rather to "rough it," and were therefore fairly knocked down,

on coming to our camp, at the gorgeousness of our tents, and the amount of luxuries which had been provided for us. A pretty lining weighs no more than an ugly one, and I was therefore well enough pleased at the bright arabesque designs with which the interiors of the tents were decorated; but I did rather grumble at the enormous "canteen," fit for a regiment, and the rolls of cocoa matting which it would be my fate to lug about at the expense of extra camels and precious time.

"We'll get rid of all this rubbish at Akabah," I ungratefully remarked, but somehow or other the rubbish always managed to stick to us. My baggage train was necessarily rather a large one. My own personal luggage consisted of one carpet bag, but the instruments and papers filled four largish boxes. Then there was that infernal "canteen," but it was the provisions and water which required most transport. Cut off as we were going to be for weeks, not only from civilization, but from all supplies, our list of provisions was necessarily a pretty

long one. I may mention 200 chickens, 50 pigeons, 8 turkeys, 100 pounds of rice, and 180 pounds of dry biscuits among the items, to give some idea of its extent. Water also was a serious matter. Twice we had five days' hard marching without a drop on the road. As a camel can go seven days with ease, and ten at a pinch, without water, this would not have mattered if it had been certain that I should always go straight ahead, but when arranging for the transport I had made it distinctly understood that I was to be able to go when I liked and stop when I liked, and as long as I liked at any place, without any consideration as to the proximity of wells. I had been led to take this precaution, knowing as I did from experience that the necessity for water is the great lever which dragomans and sheikhs employ to force the traveller who has not got the country thoroughly at his finger-ends. If they want to stop, there is no more water for days; if they want to go on, they must push on to the next well, and the unfortunate traveller, who does not like to

run the risk of dying of thirst, has to agree.

It was some years since I had done much observing, and I had got rather rusty in my star knowledge, so after dinner I spent a few hours in looking up old acquaintances, and making out which of them would be at home at convenient hours during the next six weeks.

It was barely daylight when, on the morning of the 18th, we fairly started on our journey. I have no great opinion of the Bedwin, but I must say for him that he is the sharpest man at striking or pitching a camp that I have ever come across. Within half an hour of our sitting down to breakfast everything was struck, packed, and the caravan well under weigh. Our course lay nearly due south along the shores of the Gulf of Suez, and between them and Jabal Rahah (the mountain of rest), one of the mountains which forms the north-western rim of the Tih plateau.[1] It was behind this

[1] The Tih is hardly a plateau in the ordinary acceptation of the term, being enclosed on three sides by a

mountain that poor Professor Palmer and his companions were murdered. The road we were taking was far from being the most direct one to Akabah, but as I had given out that I was going to Sinai, transport had been ordered from the Tawarah Bedwin, who occupy the country south of the Tih, and who were therefore unable to travel on the more northerly and direct route. This was the more annoying, as the geological party, notice of whose departure from England I had seen in the papers, had got six days' start of me, having left Suez on the previous Monday. It was too late now to make any alteration in my route, as a change of Bedwin would have entailed a far greater loss of time than the extra length of journey, not to mention the fact that the Tawarah had already been paid for their camels, and of all people in the world, I should imagine a Bedwin to be about the hardest to get money back from. So there was nothing for it but to push on at all speed.

range of mountains, while even the depressed central part consists of a perpetual series of hills and dales.

Our first step in the morning was to find out what this speed was going to be. A regular trigonometrical survey having been made of the country south of the Tih, this part of the journey would afford us a very good test of the accuracy of our work, and so I determined to begin sketching and observing from the time we left Ayoun Musa. The first thing to be done was, as I have said, to time the pace of the camels. A trial over a measured mile showed that the caravan moved at exactly two and a quarter miles an hour.

I also wanted to test the aneroids over this ground; so after breakfast they were all laid out, and their accompanying thermometers produced. Cash's, which he had kept in his trousers' pocket for safety, naturally read rather high. "Tie it to a bit of string, and whirl it round your head," said Peacock, who is great at "wrinkles." Cash obeyed, and the tragedy of David and Goliath was nearly enacted over again, for the string breaking, the thermometer, following one of the well-known laws of nature, continued in

its course, and was only stopped by the stomach of Ali, Sheikh of the Awarimeh Bedwin, who fortunately happened to be in its line of flight. I am sorry to say that Sheikh Ali, who was generally a very pleasant old man, showed on this occasion a most lamentable indifference to the interests of science.

Burdened as I had been by the impertinent curiosity of my fellow-Christians, it was with a sigh of relief that I had landed on the Asiatic shore, and bidden farewell, as I thought, to Europeans and questions. I was therefore more surprised than pleased, when, after an hour's march in silence, Najm announced that he had been reading in the Egyptian papers that the English were about to make a canal down the Jordan Valley, and wanted to know whether I was connected with it. Although Najm was a Maronite Christian, and of course it would be his interest to see me safely and satisfactorily through, still he might talk, and fanaticism is a nasty thing to play with, especially when it is combined with self-interest, so I thought

it best on the whole to give an evasive answer.

Keeping Jabal Rahah still on our left and the sea on our right, we marched steadily on, over about as dreary a waste as it was ever my fortune to see. The only object which broke the monotony of the eastern range was Jabal Sudur (The Paps), so-called from its breast-like appearance. A good deal of water must flow from this range at times, to judge by the water-courses which we passed when abreast of Jabal Sudur, and the amount of clay deposited in their beds. This clay was now all dried and blistered by the sun; the cracked blisters looking like so many broken pots, and suggesting the idea that there must have been a great smash of crockery in this neighbourhood. It was probably some near neighbour of these very blisters which, thousands of years ago, suggested to the inventive savage the first crude idea of pottery. Perhaps his bivouac fire, lit in one of these dry water-courses, showed him straight off that heat was all that was necessary to harden the clay. Perhaps he

reasoned if the sun hardened it a little, fire would harden it more. At any rate, the first December shower must have taught him two facts, that these blisters were handy things to carry water in, and that water made them soft and easily moulded into more convenient shapes.

After about four hours' marching, a halt was called for lunch; and as the sun was setting we caught sight of the tents, which, with the baggage, had gone ahead during the midday halt.

I have been accused of slurring over descriptions of scenery. Let me see if I can give any idea of this, the scene of our first camp. In the centre of the panorama are four white tents, faintly tinged by the after-glow of sunset. Round the tents lie groups of ill-clad Bedwin, shivering under their camel-hair blankets—for there is no wood to make a fire—and wistfully eyeing in turn the cook's charcoal brazier, and the carefully padlocked barécas, from out of which their small daily ration of water has just been served. Near them lie the camels, just

finishing their ration of beans, and looking in vain for the prickly mimosa which generally manages to struggle through existence in even the most desolate places of this desolated land. As far as the eye can reach to the north and south is a perfectly flat plain of clay covered with stones; not a blade of grass, a mimosa or tamarisk bush, not one single scrap of colour for miles and miles; nothing but one perpetual dirty drab. To the east, in the middle distance, a long, low range of sand-hills, and beyond the sand a straight line of limestone cliffs. To the west, some four miles off, a narrow strip of leaden sea, and beyond that the dark mountains of the African coast. May be, as time went on, my eyes got more accustomed to the dreariness of desert scenery, and had I come back to this place on my homeward journey I might have taken a brighter view of it. As it is, it will always leave on my mind the impression of being the most dreary scene I ever beheld.

CHAPTER III.

Curious hills—El Drahah—Camels *versus* horses—A picturesque scene—Desert shrubs—Water supply—A practical jokist—Chaos—The first casualty—A good citizen—Sketching under difficulties—News of the enemy—Revolver practice—Ras el Barrah—Wine and water.

Our first day's march had made us all rather stiff and sleepy, and it was past seven before we were off next morning. The route through the earlier part of the day lay through the same stony plain, but after two hours' riding we got amongst the low foot-hills of the Tih. Strange broken heaps of yellow clay, out of which, as we rose to a higher level, the limestone strata began to crop, giving to many of the hills a curious house-like appearance. Below the stratum the clay had broken away in a vertical wall, while above it the sand had been piled up at an angle of 45°; the

whole effect being that of a "lean-to" hut on the side of the hill. This was particularly noticeable at a place called El Drahah, which deceived all of us into the belief that it was a house. It was not till we were about abreast of Jabal Esseik, and had entered the Wady Lamarah that we began to make any considerable rise. From this point the road made a gradual, but pretty steady, ascent, and at Narkeyeh el Fûl, a narrow and abrupt pass leading down into the Wady Ghurundel, the aneroids showed a height of 3490 feet. It was nearly dark before we reached this place, not a very nice road for camels even by daylight, and loud were the cries of *hôti*, *hôti*, with which the drivers warn their beasts, as the cumbrous brutes felt their way from rock to rock. I must say for them that they never made a false step, which would hardly have been the case even with the best mountain ponies. I had always heard that camels were useless over rock, their soft feet being only adapted to sand, but this certainly does not hold good in Arabia Petræa, where sand is the exception

and stones almost the universal rule. I often rode over ground which would, I believe, have been impassable to any horses; and if anything could try their feet it would be the sharp flints of the plateau, and the knife-like fragments of volcanic rock with which the Arabah is strewn. I know a few days' walking over them reduced simply to ribbons a pair of boots which had come out of many a day's hard walking in the Umgeni without a scratch, and in one day utterly destroyed a pair of my strongest shooting-shoes, which had for many years set at defiance the sharpest rocks that Scotland can produce.

It had long been dark when we got to camp in the dry water-course of the Ghurundel. A very picturesque sight it was. Wood was plentiful, and camp-fires were lit in all directions, showing up well the dark groups of Bedwin who were crowded round them, and the camels, who, like their masters, had crept as close to the warmth as they could. As a background to each group was a feathery *syâl* shrub, lit up by the fire, and standing out boldly against the dark-blue,

starlit sky. Of all the desert shrubs this *syâl* is the most graceful, but the rarest, growing only as it does in places where water lies, at all events during the rainy season. The presence of the *handâl*, a small poisonous water-melon, also indicates a place in which some slight exception to the general curse of dryness has been made. I should imagine that the presence of either of these plants in any locality would point out that water might be got by digging. Who, after wandering in this land of dryness, and seeing the one green thing[1] which it produces, the one succulent plant which looks fit for the parched palate of thirsty man, or horse, or ox—who, after seeing this, and being told that it is a deadly poison, can say that this land is not accursed?

Of the three other desert shrubs, *rims*, *terefeh*, and *drubbel*, the *rims*, existing as it does on a minimum of moisture, is the most common. Whether the presence of these shrubs would show the neighbourhood of water or

[1] The other plants, *rims*, *drubbel*, &c., are not green; they are brown or dirty yellow.

not, I can hardly say; but it seems almost impossible to conceive that any plant, however hardy, could exist for something like ten months in the year without any moisture. Certainly the Bedwin now never thinks of digging for water; but does not the rock from which Moses obtained his supply rather point to the conclusion that it is to be so obtained? During the day's march we had passed a place in which, judging by its name, Ain el Houareh, there should have been a spring, but if there was one it was not visible to the naked eye. Perhaps the gentleman who is responsible for the nomenclature of the country was a practical joker, and enjoyed many a hearty laugh as he sat in his tent and thought of the disgust of the thirst-stricken traveller who had pushed his weary camel on to the spot in the hopes of a drink.

At best he was a mere plagiarist, carrying out in a slightly different form nature's great practical joke, the mirage. Even this falls rather flat now-a-days, and I take it that it would be a very green and inexperienced camel, and a very untravelled traveller, who

would rush forward to cool his parched lips in that remarkable result of an over-heated atmosphere.

The country to the south-east of Wady Ghurundel is a very remarkable one. If it is not in its original condition, it must have reverted to the state of this earth when it was "without form and void." Such a tumbled mass of cream-coloured irregularity never drove a map-maker to despair. In vain I tried to take bearings on one misshapen mound after another, but all the mounds were misshapen, and all alike in their utter formlessness and want of individuality; and their name was legion. There is a plan, familiar to photographers, of getting a picture of the moon as seen through a powerful glass, which consists in stirring up a Seidlitz powder (Eno's fruit salt also answers admirably) in a soup-plate, with a little water and some plaster of Paris, and photographing the result. The photograph thus produced would also pass well for a bird's-eye view of the country east of Wady Ghurundel.

Soon after leaving Wady Ghurundel I had

to record the first casualty among the instruments. My thermometer was hung on the shady side of the camel for ready reference whenever the aneroid had to be consulted, which fact I was unfortunately led to forget by the peculiarly exasperating conduct of my camel, who this morning seemed determined to prove that if she was forced to go at the breakneck pace of two and a quarter miles an hour there was nothing in the contract which compelled her to go straight. On my right wrist was hung a favourite reminiscence of South Africa, in the shape of a "sjambok," a piece of raw giraffe hide, and this I applied, with the best intentions possible, to what I thought was her unprotected hide. Unfortunately the thermometer intervened, and, as is often the case, the innocent suffered for the faults of the guilty.

Soon after this accident we passed the first sign of a human being having been this way before, in the shape of a cairn named after a certain Sana Abu Sana, on which the Bedwin each threw the orthodox stone as they passed. *A propos* of this, Peacocke, who, although a

great traveller, does not indulge much in strange tales, broke out into a beauty, to the effect that in a certain district of Afghanistan which he had visited, the inhabitants were very unhappy at not having a cairn. In vain they waited for their only holy man to die; he strangely enough seemed to take no particular interest in what every one else acknowledged was a disgrace to the parish, and lived on as contentedly as if the whole place was studded with tombs. At last a patriotic young Afghan felt that it was to be stood no longer, and, creeping up behind that holy man, with a long knife he dealt him a deadly blow between the shoulders, and piled a heap of stones over his body, to the great content and comfort of his fellow-citizens.

At the Wady el Dâl, about four hours from our last camping-ground, the chaos ended, and we entered on a system of broad stony valleys walled in by high yellow cliffs. Here we came on a little spring, the first we had seen since leaving Ayoun Musa, but the water was not good, and as there was still

enough in the barécas to last us to the next well, we did not take in a supply. The camels, however, were offered a drink, but, although they had not tasted water for four days, only one or two of them would take it.

By lunch-time I had used up my day's supply of dry plates, so in order to carry away with me any remembrances of this strange country I was reduced to the use of my pencil. I had been assured before starting that I was to have a good *hajeen*, or riding-camel; but in this I had been sadly deceived. The beast on which I found myself mounted, when it was too late to change, was a most unmistakable baggage-camel, with all the slow movements, dishabitude of control, and browsing habits of his tribe. I had counted, when anything of interest was passed, on being able to stop, take a photograph, and catch up the caravan; but mounted on this brute this was impossible, and if I wanted to stop, the whole procession had to wait for me. The result was that, except at the midday halt, I scarcely

got a chance of using my big camera, and but for one of Marion's small "academy" cameras, which I carried with me on the camel, I should hardly have taken any photographs at all. With this excellent little instrument, which has a "finder" attached, I could photograph anything of interest as I rode along. Greatly as I had valued it before, I never realized its full worth till lack of plates forced me to do without it. Anything more maddening than trying to sketch on a wobbling camel it is hard to imagine. Perhaps one is getting a last glimpse of some retreating rock or fast-closing gorge, by turning in one's saddle to the utmost; then round goes the camel for a certainty in the opposite direction, round one slues oneself to the left, and off goes the camel to the right again. Seizing the rein in desperation, one takes a haul, round comes a great snarling head, which stares one in the face, but on goes the body straight as a die. A straight pull brings the beast's head up between one's legs, but is quite powerless to stop his way. A hit on the side of the head

sends him off for about twenty paces at a bone-shaking trot. In the meanwhile the gorge has closed, the page in one's sketch-book got lost, and one's pencil dropped in the sand, and one's temper simply nowhere.

An eight-hours' ride brought us to the foot of Jabal Sarbout el Jamal, under which we passed through a narrow gorge called Ben Sudr, entering on the other side a fine amphitheatre of rocks, in the middle of which our camp was pitched. This amphitheatre is formed by the closing in of the walls of the Wady el Hamr, or red valley, so called from the high sandstone walls which bound it; its more easterly portion, which runs through limestone cliffs, being called Wady el Baida, or the white valley. On the north of these valleys is the southern wall of the Tih plateau, on the south a long low spur of Jabal Serabit. A very dreary place is this Wady el Baida, destitute even of the variety of light and shade which the tumbled country near Wady Ghurundel gave, and of the grandeur which is inseparable from two great frowning walls of rock, such as we had had

at Ben Sudr. Nothing here but low, white, glaring hills, with hardly a projection to cast a shadow, and not a shrub to relieve the eye.

"If you were to put Dr. Tanner for forty days and forty nights in this place," said Cash, "there would not be much of him left."

For the last twenty miles or so we had been steering due east, but at the point where the Wady el Baida, or Ghaib, as it is here called, runs into the Debbet el Ramleh, or "plain of sand," we turned in a more southerly direction, and, crossing one of the north-eastern spurs of Jabal Serabit, entered the first of a series of narrow valleys which run towards the Sinai range.

During the day's march we had met a Bedwin, the first living thing we had seen since leaving Ayoun Musa. The encounter was the more welcome as he was able to give us news of the opposition party, whom he said were only three days' march ahead of us. As they had had six days' start of us from Suez this gave me great hopes of getting to Akabah before them after all, the more so as

they were pretty certain to spend a day or two at Sinai.

The next day brought some slight change in the monotony of our route. We lost for a time the endless stones, and travelled for some hours down the Wady el Ramleh, over fine, firm sand. At the junction of this wady with that of El Barak is a Bedwin cemetery, consisting of some two dozen graves, all lying east and west, and each headed by a rough stone, on which I could not see any inscription or distinctive mark. In the centre were the ruins of a stone hut.

"Are they buried deep?" asked Cash, who, until familiarity had bred its accompanying contempt, had a holy horror of the Bedwin.

"About three feet," said Najm.

The subject dropped, and I never learnt whether or no Cash considered this a sufficient precaution against the resurrection.

About halfway up the Wady el Barak is a stone wall extending nearly across the valley. I was told that it was built by an expedition

sent against the Bedwin by Abas Pasha, and that his troops firing from behind it defeated the enemy with great slaughter at this place. Not a very nice country, this, to march troops across, with its deep narrow ravines and its utter lack of supplies. Cash, however, discovered one good point about it from a military point of view. "What a beautiful rifle-range this would make!" he said as he rode between the bare walls of rock. From rifle-ranges his thoughts naturally turned on shooting, and presently he asked me if he might fire a shot with the revolver which he carried. I was riding behind him, and therefore had not the slightest objection. I had once fired myself off a Moorish mule, to the great discomfort of myself, and annihilation of my hat, and the amusement of the spectators; and I was rather anxious to see the same experiment tried off a Sinaitic camel. Najm, on the contrary, was riding in front, and seemed to view matters in a wholly different light. So far from taking any interest in the experiment, he suddenly became lost in deep thought. So absorbing was his

reverie that he not only took a wrong turn, but became totally deaf to the shouts of the Bedwin who tried to put him right. By the time he had found out his mistake, the caravan had passed, and he had to take his place in the rear. Far be it from me even to hint that Najm was afraid of one miserable revolver, but the best of us are liable to lose ourselves at times.

The country here was so confined and the view so limited, that the route sketch resolved itself into little more than running a traverse; so, finding the time hang rather heavily on my hands, I tried the experiment of doing some of the night's work as I rode along, and was glad to find that it answered capitally. With all the observations worked out and the diary written by the time I got into camp, I could finish the rest of the work before dinner, and have the evening undisturbed for observing or sleep, as I felt inclined. I hate a camel, but I must say that he is a very convenient beast to work on; his very slowness makes writing easy, his utter apathy to all worldly things, except

rims bushes, prevents him giving those sudden jerks and starts which are so annoying when one is trying to write on a horse, while his great bulk enables one to have saddle-bags which are large enough to carry everything one wants in the way of books, &c.

At the Ras el Barrah, a narrow pass which divides the valley of that name from the Wady el Barak, we reached the height of 3000 feet. The view from this place is rather fine. On either side of the pass are two strangely shaped conical hills, surmounted by castle-like projections of rock. Looking between them one sees at one's feet the sandy amphitheatre of the Wady el Barrah opening out on the south between the somewhat similar cones of rock at Ain el Barrah. Through the second pass is a pretty peep of the low, undulating country to the north of Sinai, lit up at the time I saw it by a streak of pink from the setting sun, contrasting with the black, frowning rocks of the Ras el Barrah, and the misty purple of the Sinai range which towered above it.

At Ain el Barrah, a muddy little pool sur-

rounded by reeds, we replenished our barécas. The change of water was certainly not one for the better. The sweet-water canal may still possibly contain a few reminiscences of our late glorious campaign, but a week's trial had proved that a dead Egyptian is quite as harmless as a live one. At all events he does not promote thirst, which is more than can be said for the mixture of salt and mud which it was my fate to drink for the next six weeks.

Any of my personal friends who are good enough to read this book may possibly wonder at my taking so much interest in the quality of the water, so I may as well here say that I always teetotal when I travel. Wine takes up too much room, and means an extra camel or two; and the addition of any quantity of whisky will not make salt water fresh. Alcohol, too, like Christmas Day, is a capital invention for those who have time for it, and on the present occasion I had not. I do not wish to lay down the law to other people, who ought to know their own stomachs by this time; but my own ex-

perience is that for one hour's work which I can do after a pint of champagne (did not I wish sometimes that I could get it!), I can do two on half a pint of muddy water, even if it has a dash of that putrefying organic matter about which such a fuss is made.

CHAPTER IV.

Sinai—An opposition mountain—*Embarras de richesses*—A misnomer—Ain el Arkhdar—Seductive oasis—Longitude in time—Mabrukka—Another casualty—An unknown friend—End of the stern chase—The Wady el Ain—The power of steam—A well-conducted establishment.

On coming to the end of the Wady el Barrah our route turned again to the east, leaving that which goes to Sinai on our right. It was down this road to Sinai that our geological friends had gone, and I had great hopes of getting ahead of them before they struck the main road again.

The range is a very fine one, though Mount Sinai itself is not particularly conspicuous among the many high peaks, among which is Jabal Surbal, an opposition mountain which the Bedwin believe to be the identical hill on which were writtten those ten

commandments which poor humanity have ever since had so much trouble to keep. They are in the habit of making pilgrimages to its summit, carrying with them prayers which they have got some learned man to write, and depositing them in an earthen vessel concealed in a cleft of the rock. There is also in this range a Jabal Elijah, which is pointed out as the mountain on which that prophet was fed by ravens.

The bush which Moses saw burning is in the immediate neighbourhood of these two mountains, and a chapel has been built over the spot.

One would have fancied that there was already enough in this neighbourhood to satisfy the most exacting pilgrim, but it appears to have been thought otherwise, and an additional attraction has been provided by the miraculous transportation of St. Catherine's body to the summit of one of the neighbouring mountains.

It is not until one travels in these countries that one fully appreciates the

considerate thoughtfulness of the holy men of old, in doing their most remarkable acts in such a comparatively small district, and their saving future generations from long desert-pilgrimages. What needless trouble and expense it would have caused had Moses seen his burning bush at Wady Halfa, still receiving the ten commandments on Sinai; while Elijah, instead of coming all the way down to the Sinaitic range to be fed by ravens, had gone to the other side of Palmyra in the desert for that purpose. Had Moses' brother Barkeyeh only come to some convenient place to die, instead of slinking off into the inaccessible granite ranges to the east of Akabah, who knows but that he might now be venerated by Christian millions, instead of being believed in only by a few ill-fed, ragged Bedwin.

The Convent of Mount Sinai is not a convent at all, but a monastery. It is called a convent by the dragomans, to induce young and ardent travellers to visit it. I was deceived myself for some time, and but for the excellent handbook of the omniscient

Mr. Murray, I might have wasted two days of my valuable time on twenty-four monks. I often smiled to myself as I thought of the disgust of the geologists when they found out their mistake, and knew that these twenty-four monks had just helped me to get ahead of them. There was one thing in it, however, which I should have liked to see, and that was the portrait of the clever little dancing-girl who managed to captivate its founder, that priggish young gentleman the Emperor Justinian.

Our road now lay through a series of narrow valleys and rocky passes which led up to Zebardîn Ezeranîb, a high plateau which forms the watershed between the Gulf of Akabah and the valleys below Sinai. It is approached by the Wady el Arkhdar (the green valley), a gorge which in its lower portions gives the most direct lie to its own name. Near its summit, however, is the Ain el Arkhdar, as pretty a little patch of green as one could wish to see anywhere, and which in this land of barrenness seemed a perfect paradise. Suddenly the Wady el Arkhdar

narrows, and a curious natural wall of rock, some thirty feet high, runs across it, having in its centre a narrow opening. It is hard to believe that this is not the work of man, so striking a resemblance has it to the ruined gateway of some Eastern town. Passing through the gateway one rides for 100 yards or so through a narrow, sunless gorge, as bleak and desolate as any in the whole peninsula, then suddenly turning round an angle in the wall such a scene of light, and green, and beauty bursts upon one as after a week or more of utter brownness fairly takes away one's breath. On either side are still the rocky cliffs, here rather lower and farther apart, but, streaming in at the ends of the gorge as the sun does, they only suggest the idea of pleasant coolness, instead of the impression of dreary coldness which the gorges that are altogether sheltered from the sun give. Nestling under the cliffs on the right is a clump of graceful palms, and opposite to them a single palm surrounded by a circular green patch of tobacco. By the side of the tobacco patch is a little well, protected

at the top by two rough stone slabs. On one of these slabs are two shapely little feet and legs, peeping out from a swaying mass of white. For some time the swaying goes on, and there rises from out of the ground a black, headless body, with its two half-amputated arms sticking straight out into the air. Rather a "turn" it would give to any timid young lady who happened to pull at the rope to which it is attached; but it is very harmless, and even, on close examination, a very helpless-looking thing, and it holds the water which Zuleika, or Fatima (or whatever her beautiful name is), the maiden of the well, is drawing for us poor thirsty travellers. Near the well, with his back to the tobacco patch, sits a thin, haggard old man, with a long white beard, and long brown hands, pulling in silence at the brass mouthpiece of his syâl-wood pipe.

That is all that there was to be seen at Ain el Arkhdar: half a dozen trees, a patch of tobacco, a well, a girl, and an old man, and yet I shall always look back on that little oasis as one of the pleasantest places I ever visited.

The old man was not very full of conversation, but he told us that he had no companion but his little daughter, and that he suffered from heart-disease. He had been told that sugar was an infallible remedy for this complaint, and would be very grateful if we would give him some. Before dispensing the remedy, I regret to say that one of the party gave vent in infamous Arabic to a well-worn compliment, which at home would have brought upon him well-earned contempt. Here he fared better than he deserved, and was rewarded by the sight of two little dimples, a row of white teeth, and as pretty a little blush as the warmest blood of all Arabia can produce.

On getting to camp I found that I was not the only person who had found the shade by the green fountain pleasant. When we halted for lunch the baggage, under command of Petrōs, the cook, marched on, and his orders were not to halt till an hour before sunset. Great was my disgust then, on mounting a slight rise in the ground at about four in the afternoon, to see before me the camels all unladen

and the camp being pitched. The conclusion was obvious, that Petrōs had neglected the narrow path of duty for the broad road of pleasure, and made a very prolonged halt by the green well-side. The consequence was that we who had resisted the attractions of this lovely but seductive oasis were disgusted, a good hour before sunset, to see our camp only just being pitched, and our dinner, in embryo, still cackling gaily amongst the camels.

This was the more annoying as I had calculated on just getting beyond the geological party before they entered the main road, and this two-hours' delay seemed likely to give them the chance of rejoining it before I passed the junction.

I pursued on this occasion a course which I have always found to be singularly successful, and roundly abused the wrong man. If that wrong man happens also to be an aggrieved party, and about on an equality with the culprit, but a stronger man, the success of this plan is perfect. The person abused would probably have spoken his mind quite as freely as one would oneself, without any

further inducement; but when to his own proper grievance comes that of being unjustly blamed, his wrath knows no bounds, and one is able to go to bed with the happy certainty that the offender will get his full deserts.

The sun had fairly risen, next morning, before we were under weigh; so I thought, after the cook's slackness the day before, that it was about time to give my followers a general stirring-up. Najm listened to my remarks in respectful silence, and when I had done produced his watch showing 6.30 by Suez time.

"If it comes to watches," I said, "here is one which shows 4.20, which is the time now in London." This I thought rather a good practical way of showing the effect of longitude on time.

"But *my* watch very good, sar, given me by Mr. Smith from England—you know him, sar?"—was all the answer I got. I did not think it worth while pushing the lesson in astronomy farther, so simply settled to start at 6 instead of 6.30, by Mr. Smith's watch.

The north-east limit of Zebardîn Ezeranîb is marked by a low range, or rather group, of curious limestone hillocks, worn into the most fantastic shapes by wind and weather; between them winds a deep rocky cañon, flowing from the south, and emptying itself into the head of the Wady Zuleika. The path between the hills and this gorge is very narrow in places, and the road would be an extremely nasty one to travel in the dark. Even by daylight I noticed that Najm thought it more prudent to get off and walk. Najm has so many good qualities that I have the less hesitation in saying that he was never thoroughly at home upon a camel.

Leaving this strange, weird scenery, we began to descend into the Wady Zuleika, a broad sandy valley, some fifteen miles in length, running between limestone hills and studded pretty thickly with *rims* bushes. I suppose one ought not to grumble at a camel's taking advantage of his only means of livelihood in this country, but it would be a great comfort if he could only be persuaded

to take his meals at regular hours. Two and a quarter miles an hour is slow enough in all conscience for anybody, but in a country studded with *rims* even that pace is reduced by nearly half. Then he does not march, he simply browses along. Sometimes the conduct of my beast would exasperate even its owner, Mohammed; then would pour forth a torrent of language which I am thankful to say my limited knowledge of Arabic prevented me from understanding. Even this was rare, and he never by any chance hit her. Nothing surprised me more about these Bedwin than their kindness to their camels. No one hates cruelty to animals more than I do, but "spare the rod and spoil the child" applies also to a camel. Indeed there is a striking resemblance between a camel and a spoilt child. Both are peevish and spiteful, impatient of control, and inclined to cry out at the least thing which displeases them; neither are satisfied unless they are doing precisely the thing which the whim of the moment urges, even then they generally look sulky and dissatisfied, and above all they

are both sadly in want of a thorough good periodical thrashing.

By the way I may say that the animal on which I had the misfortune to ride rejoiced in the name of "Mabrukka," or the miracle, a most appropriate one for so unique a beast. The emphasis with which Mohammed used to pronounce this name had inspired Cash with the belief that the Arabic language was a particularly powerful one, a belief which was greatly strengthened by his hearing Mohammed reply "kodam," in answer to my inquiry as to which way the road led. I may mention that the Bedwin pronounce the Arabic *kaf* like a hard English *g*. Mohammed's answer was a very innocent one, meaning simply "before, straight on."

When nearly at the eastern end of the Wady Zuleika we turned out of it to the south, and entered a stony amphitheatre called Wady el Ma'adah, in which our camp was pitched. In this place the second casualty amongst my instruments occurred, one of my boiling-point thermometers being in this case the sufferer.

For the information of the unscientific reader, let me say that a boiling-point apparatus consists of three pieces. A finely graduated thermometer, a vessel to hold water, with a spirit lamp attached, and a chimney fitting on to the top of the boiler. Inside this chimney the thermometer is held in its place by means of two indiarubber washers. I had read one of the thermometers which registered 207, and was therefore surprised on lighting the lamp below the other, to see it run up to 210°. I at once suspected that something was wrong, and was in the act of blowing out the lamp, when up flew the chimney and thermometer into the air, the latter coming down in two pieces. The cause of the accident was evident. The pressure of the steam had jammed the lower washer into the mouth of the chimney, and so cut off its own escape. The increased temperature of the boiling-point was of course caused by the extreme pressure of the confined steam. After that I always read my aneroids before I began to boil and, at the expense of burning my fingers, whipped off

the chimney the moment I saw any suspicious rise of temperature.

Here I have to congratulate some unknown friend on the success of an excellent practical joke, which came off on this eventful evening. Rather tired, very cold, and abominably out of temper, I bethought me of a certain sailor's guernsey which I had with me, but which I had not worn for nearly five years. I was in a great hurry, as I had some work which I particularly wanted to finish before dinner; so running into my tent I dived into my bag, fished out the guernsey, wriggled into it, and when in that particularly helpless position found the sleeves carefully sewn up. Little did my unknown waggish friend think, as he sewed up those sleeves in the year of grace 1878, that his jest would take effect at such an auspicious moment, five years later, beneath the shadow of Mount Sinai.

Under the shadow of this same mountain I regret to say we broke the fifth of those commandments which were issued from its

summit.[1] The wicked, I am informed, always prosper in this world, and our wickedness was rewarded in the course of the day, by our overtaking our rivals. They were encamped in a bend of the Wady el Ain, which is here so narrow that it was impossible to pass them unobserved, so there was nothing for it but to march on and try to look as innocent as possible. As we approached the camp several pairs of field-glasses were seen peering out of the tent, and it was evident that the eminent geologists[2] were surveying us with great interest through the openings in the canvas. A swarthy gentleman in pepper-and-salt trousers then stepped boldly out, and arms akimbo awaited our approach. He turned out to be the dragoman of the party, and at once treated Najm to some of the choicest flowers of Arabian metaphor for his undragoman-like conduct

[1] I believe scientific gentlemen disagree upon this point as upon most others.

[2] I afterwards learnt that there was only one geologist, Professor Hull, in the party; but that was the name by which we always knew them.

in allowing us to do a journey in seven days, which might have been prolonged to fourteen.

"When will you get to Akabah?" he then asked.

Najm did not know. Perhaps I might order them to travel day and night till we got there; perhaps I might halt for ten days in this very valley; all that he knew was that I gave the orders, and that he had to obey them.

"I suppose this gentleman of yours is going to survey for this new canal?" said the leader of the opposition.

"It was very possible," said Najm; but as I had never told him what I was going to do, he really could not say.

"I expect those chaps are after this same canal," said Cash, as we rode away. "I should not think that any one would come to a place like this for pleasure."

The whole of the day's march had been through the Wady el Ain, or valley of the spring, a huge fissure taking its rise in a small spring, whose overflowing waters have

furrowed out a narrow gully some twenty feet in depth. Gradually descending and widening as affluent wadys add to the force of its torrent, at its mouth it is an imposing gorge 200 yards in width, with granite walls 1000 feet high. In places it widens out to 400 yards or 500 yards, in others, again, its walls close in, leaving a passage through which two laden camels have hardly room to pass. Some of these narrow gorges are very fine, and there is something very grand in the towering granite rocks, the cold dark shadows of the valley's bed, and above all in the utter solitude and silence of the place; but after a few hours the rocks and silence begin to pall, and one begins to long for a gust of wind, a breath of fresh air, and a glimpse of something more extended than the walls of rock and the narrow strip of blue sky which shows between them.

The dry season was just at its close when I passed through the valley, and the waters of the little spring, from which it takes its name, had become completely lost in the sand before they had run two miles of their

course towards the sea. Everything pointed, however, to the force and depth of the torrent during the rainy season; the stony, water-worn bed, the high-water mark twenty feet up the rocky walls, and the uprooted trees all showed that at certain times of the year a deep, raging torrent must rush through this valley and completely fill its bed. Indeed Najm assured me that in the months of December and January this route from Suez to Akabah is completely closed. With a southerly wind and several ominous-looking clouds floating about to seaward, I could not not help remembering that the season of thunderstorms was due, and thinking of what an awkward plight we should be in, were a sudden "spate" to come on. A man would doubtless be able to climb to some resting-place on the cliffs, but there are not a dozen places in the whole length of the valley on to which a camel could escape from the flood; and, with all his faults, the prince of slowness does carry the food which for weeks together is unobtainable in this land of desolation. A few years ago a whole Bedwin encamp-

ment was caught in the neighbouring Wady Feiran and carried bodily out to sea.

In the Wady Ma'addah I had had, by the loss of my boiling-point thermometer, a painful, but practical, illustration of the power of compressed steam. On the following day, in the Wady el Ain, Hassan, one of the camel-drivers, had another. We had just spread out our carpets for the midday halt, and were settling down to lunch, when I heard a loud report which echoed like a salvo of artillery from cliff to cliff. At the same moment I saw a general scattering of the circle of Bedwin, who had already lit a fire and squatted round it. It seemed that Najm had thought that a little hot lunch would be a pleasant change, and had given Anthonōs, one of the servants, a tin of stewed veal to warm on the fire. Anthonōs had passed it on to one of the cameleers, who had put it on the fire without first boring a vent-hole. The only damage done was the loss of the veal, a slight wound in Hassan's leg, and a few extra holes in the other Bedwin's garments.

It is amusing to see that here in the desert work is carried on in much the same way as in the best conducted of English houses. The master gives the order, the butler receives it and passes it on through various hands, till at last the "odd man," or boy, carries it out. Here I say, "Najm, it is time to be off." Najm springs up smartly, says, "All right, sar," and "Ya, Mohammed! bring those camels at once," and sinks back to sleep. Mohammed complacently sips his coffee, smokes his pipe, and sings out, "Ya, walad (Hi, boy)! bring the camels." When they are ready, Najm announces the fact in a tone which unmistakably means, "See how quick I have been, and how hard I have worked."

CHAPTER V.

The sea again—The little world—The old Eve—The Admiralty chart—Distance lends enchantment—An old friend avenged—Custom walks in—El Kuryeh—An enthusiastic fisherman—Akabah—An unpleasant surprise—A reminder—The orderly-room clerk—Hammid Jad—A pretty pair—The thin end of the wedge—Requirements of a barometer.

For two whole days we marched between the high walls of the Wady el Ain, and it was not until late in the afternoon of Nov. 24th that a sudden bend in the valley showed us the Gulf of Akabah and the distant Arabian hills peeping through the huge rocky gateway which forms the head of the valley. It was a great relief to get out of that dark, narrow chasm and see once again the broad, blue sky and distant hills. There was a prison-like feeling about the valley which, after a time, made it very oppressive. What

a strange place it was for two rival parties of Englishmen to meet in! A hundred miles or more from one of their kind, forced, literally, to jostle each other arm to arm in this narrow gorge, and determined, on no account, to have anything to do with each other. I have since had the pleasure of making Major Kitchener's acquaintance, and we have had many a laugh over the absurdity of the situation, which was further enhanced by the fact that he and Peacocke had been old friends at Woolwich. In the Wady el Arabah we were deadly foes, and I do not mind owning that I did my humble best to put as many spokes as possible in his wheel. He has never made a similar admission to me, but I do not fancy that he went very much out of his way to assist "the civil engineers," as we were called by our rivals.

Washing, as may be imagined, is a luxury which cannot be very freely indulged in in the desert, and on arriving at our camping-ground on the beach the first thought of the three Europeans of the party was a dip in the Gulf of Akabah; but as sharks are pretty

plentiful about this coast,[1] I did not think it wise to venture very far out.

I had been floating about for some five minutes, when I noticed a white object running towards me. In the deepening twilight I could just make out that it was human, and remembering the ways of these free sons of the desert, I thought it well to be near my watch and clothes when it arrived, so striking out rapidly for the shore I effected a landing at the same moment that the object arrived on the beach. It turned out to be a youthful native, a black-eyed, white-toothed imp, who, to judge by the breathless state in which it arrived, must have run a considerable distance to see what a Christian was like with his clothes off. After a prolonged and critical examination it clapped its hands and, goodness knows why, laughed. Now there was something in this laugh which, for the first time, threw a doubt on my mind as to the sex of my spectator. "Inta walad au bint?" I asked, and was told, with the sweetest of

[1] A few days later Peacocke saw a large one within twenty feet of the shore.

smiles, that she was a young lady. Now this was rather an awkward dilemma to be placed in. Prompted by my natural modesty, my first instinct was hastily to clothe myself; on the other hand, my native politeness told me that to deprive a young lady, without cause, of a sight which she evidently enjoyed so much, would be, to say the least of it, extremely rude. Fearing that in either case I may be blamed by one section of my readers, I think it better not to mention the course which I actually pursued, but beg them to imagine that I did whatever they would have done under the same circumstances. I may say, however, that when I was dressed I thought that it was only kind to draw her attention to Peacocke, who was bathing a couple of hundred yards to the northward.

Our camp was close to a well and clump of palms known as Nawibi. Near the palms is a circular stone building used for storing the dates when they are plucked. I see on the chart that the water is marked as bad, which is, I suppose, correct, but it is as good

as any to be obtained on this coast during the dry season. The wells about here are all dug within fifty yards (sometimes even less) of high-water mark, and the water in them is, I believe, nothing more or less than sea-water filtered through sand. It is not nice, and it makes one rather thirsty, but it keeps one alive, which is, after all, about all that one expects water to do.

This place is shown on the Admiralty chart as being south of the Wady el Ain, which, whatever may have been the case when the survey was made, it certainly is not now. I took a meridian altitude of Formalhaut at our camp, and found the latitude to be 29° 4′ N., the Admiralty chart assigning to it a latitude of 28° 57′. If its relative position was right on the chart, I should not presume to dispute the correctness of the Admiralty survey on such insufficient evidence as a single observation of a star, but I think the fact of its being misplaced in the chart with regard to so conspicuous a landmark as the mouth of the Wady el Ain, tends to throw some doubt on the latitude assigned to it.

With all respect for the gentlemen who made the survey of this gulf, I must say that they have left plenty of field for fresh workers. The coast-line near Nawibi is fairly accurate, but the head of the gulf is certainly given a wrong shape, and, as I shall endeavour to prove later on, Akabah is misplaced. These, however, are comparatively unimportant details; it is in the shape of the mountains that there is most room for improvement. Along this coast are several well-marked and easily distinguished peaks which, were their position accurately fixed, would be of the greatest use to navigators, but not only are they unnamed, but wholly undistinguished, the whole range being represented by one of those conventional portraits of a caterpillar, by means of which the unobservant traveller is in the habit of indicating a range of mountains, no matter what their shape.

Our route now ran along the narrow strip of shingle which separates the mountain from the Gulf of Akabah. After the endless, dreary walls of the Wady el Ain, and the lifeless monotony of the desert, this barren beach, edged by the blue sea, seemed a per-

fect paradise. On the other side of the gulf, about eleven miles distant, ran the rugged, purple hills of Arabia, whose furrowed faces, partly lit up by the rising sun, made a marvellous network of light and shade. These hills were a good example of the enchantment which distance lends. They were in all probability identical in form and colouring with the shapeless mass of dirty clay and bare, weather-stained granite which bounded the shingle on our left; yet while from the one the eye turned instinctively away, utterly weary of the monotonous brownness, on the other it rested with a feeling of delight. Had we crossed over to the Arabian shore, the converse would have held equally good.

"What nonsense!" the scientific reader will exclaim; "as if all the world did not know that aqueous particles held in a state of suspension in the atmosphere give a blue tinge to distant objects." Quite right, my scientific reader, but can you explain why, proverbs notwithstanding, a bird in the bush always seems so much better than two in the hand.

I have got a very decent sort of bath-sponge, an old friend who has sent a cold shiver down my back on many a winter's morning, and until it actually fell to pieces I should probably never have thought of getting another, had I not noticed some of extraordinary size on this Aelanitic beach. "Bring me one of those things," I said to Thîr (one of the cameleers). He brought me a large shell. "No, not that." Then he came back in triumph with a piece of red coral. "What an ass the fellow is!" I said to myself; "however, I *will* have that sponge." So the whole caravan was stopped, Mabrukka, after much roaring, made to kneel down, and back I trudged towards my prize. It was a great, hard lump of white coral, weighing some dozen pounds. My poor, despised old friend still sends a shiver down my back as well as ever.

I had made out that our camp at Nawibi was just forty-five miles from Akabah, and, thinking that our geological friends would probably begin to hurry a little now that they knew that we were ahead of them, I

determined if possible to make a push, and get to Akabah in two days. Not a very great feat one would think, but twenty-two and a half miles a day, at two and a quarter miles an hour means ten hours' steady marching. This is not much when the days are long, or when one has plenty of forage for the camels; but our supply of beans had run out, and our beasts had to be content with the scanty *rims* bushes, which were dotted here and there along the beach, and for some reason best known to himself a camel does not seem to thrive on what he gets at night. The strongest reason, however, against our getting to Akabah in two days was the fact that it was against the custom. From Nawibi to Akabah was a three-days' march, I was told; nobody knew why, but so it was. I had the presumption to make up my mind that in this case it was going to be a two-days' march, but, as will be seen, custom as usual got the best of it.

"Remember that you are not to halt before sunset," I shouted to Petrōs, as he left us at the midday halt.

"Remember that you are not to halt before sunset," was echoed by Najm, Yosef, Anthonōs, Sheikhs Ali and Aïd, and everybody who wished to show his keenness; and "Not before sunset," faintly floated back from the lips of Petrōs as he disappeared round a neighbouring bluff.

I had fully intended to ride on with the caravan myself, and see that they did do their full day's march, but, deceived by all this protestation, I was weak enough to change my mind, and enjoy the rest of the midday halt. I first began to be undeceived by the inordinate time which it took to get under way again. To begin with, an extraordinary somnolence seemed to have seized the whole party.

"Time to be off, Najm!" I shouted.

Najm rubbed his eyes, and really thought we had hardly halted half an hour yet. Hassan, and Mohammed, and Thîr were buried in the deepest of slumbers, and the boy was nowhere to be found. Then the camels had strayed farther than usual and took a long time to be collected; and it was

a most extraordinary thing that the saddles would not fit to-day, and the saddle-bags had to be unpacked half a dozen times before everything could be got into its place. The conclusion to be drawn from all this was obvious. Petrōs was going to stop early in the afternoon, and I was to be deceived into thinking that we had done a good day's march, by not being allowed to reach the camp till after dark. During the march every attempt was made to carry out this scheme. The coast-line here consists of a series of bays and rounded promontories of shingle. This shingle was perfectly flat, and just as good going inland as along the beach; but every one was determined to follow religiously along the shore-line. If I tried to ride straight across from bay to bay I was told, first that the road was bad, next that there was no road (there was none anywhere), and then that there was a deep ravine to be crossed. I had just come to the southern horn of one of these bays, when I noticed a train of camels winding along the opposite promontory, and, whip-

ping out my glasses, had the satisfaction of recognizing my friend Petrōs in their midst. I at once noted the time, and marked the spot where they disappeared. It was then about half-past three. On arriving at this place about an hour and a half later, there was the camp snugly pitched in a little hollow within 100 yards of the place where I had seen the caravan. It was too late then to order the camp to be moved, and I had so far been bested that there was now but little chance of getting to Akabah on the following day; but, at all events, I had the satisfaction of knowing that my men had not succeeded in deceiving me, and, I have reason to hope, of making everybody thoroughly uncomfortable for the rest of the evening.

An observation of the pole-star showed that we had only made 16′ of northing in the day's march.

The shingle now began to narrow very considerably, the cliffs in places reaching to the water's edge, and forcing the camels to wade, a proceeding which they did not at all

seem to understand or appreciate. Wetting his feet is the one thing which a camel cannot stand, and in muddy ground he becomes quite useless, his soft splay feet spread out in the slippery mud, and split, and he becomes, if not permanently injured, at all events very lame for some time. The camels had had no water now since leaving Ain Arkhdar five days ago, and, although they are supposed to do without water for seven days as a rule, and ten at a pinch, they were all quite ready for a drink, and it must have been very tantalizing for the poor brutes not to be allowed to put their noses in the tempting clear water in which they were walking.

In one place, the cliffs running straight down into deep water, we had to make a long *détour* over the hills, through the Wady el Hoïmradâd; and a very bad bit of road it was, taking us nearly an hour and a half to march, and barely advancing us a mile along the coast-line. The whole of this day's march was full of annoying *détours*, the coast being cut up by narrow coves and creeks, some of

them barely 100 yards across, and yet taking the best part of an hour to get round. Charming little places they would have been to anchor in, in a yacht, or paddle about in a dinghy; but, having neither a yacht nor a dinghy, I did not appreciate their beauties as much as perhaps I ought.

In the course of the afternoon we passed some picturesque ruins of a castle situated on the little island of Kuryeh, about 200 yards from the shore. This must have been a very strong place in its day, but I could not see a sign of vegetation on it, and the Bedwin could not tell me whether it had any water supply; it certainly did not look as if it had. Near the island I was puzzled for a long time by a strange black object about half a mile out to sea. At first I thought it was a rock, then, when I distinctly saw it moving, I concluded that it must be some strange sea monster, and it was not until I got abreast of it, and had a good look through my glasses, that I discovered that it was a human being seated on two inflated goat-skins, and amusing himself by an afternoon's

sea-fishing. As the Bedwin could not tell me what he was fishing for, I had to draw my own conclusions, and as he sat with his bare legs dangling in the water, the most probable conjecture seemed to be that he was fishing for sharks, and that there was every probability of his having good sport.

During nearly the whole of the day we had been in sight of a long fringe of palms upon the opposite shore; beyond them, to the northward, stretched the same range of hills which had faced us during the whole of our march along the gulf, which seemed to extend indefinitely to the northward. It was, therefore, with some surprise that I learnt, as we came opposite to them, that this fringe of palms was Akabah, and, on looking to my left, saw a low bank of shingle running right across the gulf. This low shingle bank is all that divides the Aelanitic Gulf from the Wady el Arabah.

Misled by the big letters of the maps, I was still under the impression that Akabah must be a fair-sized town, and peered in vain through the twilight for its houses and

minarets, but not a vestige of anything but palms was to be seen. The rising sun next morning showed us little more, and it was with some impatience that I started to march round the head of the gulf, and penetrate that mysterious green veil. The fact was that there was nothing behind it. Akabah consists of one low square fort and a row of mud huts; just a fort and a row of mud huts too many. Without them and their villainous inhabitants, Akabah would be about as nice a place as one could spend a winter's day in. Sheltered by the graceful palm-grove, overlooking the lovely, clear blue gulf, with its fringe of dazzling white sand, on which a thousand varieties of bright corals and shapely shells are scattered, hemmed in by bold granite rocks and towering peaks, fanned during the hottest weather by a northerly breeze, Akabah only wants a bloody war and a sickly season, followed by the arrival of one's yacht, with a French cook, a few cases of champagne, an ice-making machine, and the only woman one ever loved, on board, to make it a perfect winter retreat

for any young man who does not mind roughing it, as long as he can enjoy the beauties of nature.

The word Akabah means an obstacle. The town, I am told, stands on the site of the ancient Eloath, a statement which I have no reason to doubt, but it certainly does not stand on the site assigned to it on the modern maps. Apart from the question of latitude, which I shall go into later on, it is undoubtedly placed on the maps a good five miles too far from the head of the gulf. Its fort is a substantial stone building, capable of holding 600 or 700 men; it is screened from the sea by the palm-grove, and commanded by the high ground on the east. An inscription over the gateway states that it was built by the Sultan Selim in the year 1122 after the Hajera (1762 A.D.). Round the fort are clustered a few wretched mud huts, inhabited by the families of the garrison (about twenty men).

At 8 a.m. on the morning of the 29th I rode into Akabah, having left England exactly three weeks, and Suez twelve days.

So far everything had gone even better than I expected. I had never had to halt a whole day in any place since leaving England, and I was ahead of the geologists, who had had a fortnight's start of me from England, and six days' start of me from Suez, and, as far as I knew, there were not half a dozen people in the outside world who had the faintest idea of my whereabouts.

The first person whom I saw on entering Akabah was my friend the dragoman of the geologists. The sight of him gave me what old ladies call "quite a turn." "Can they have stolen a march on me," I wondered, "and slipped past me in the night?" No; I soon learnt that they were still safely in my rear, but had sent on their emissary with a letter to the governor, asking that official to send for the sheikh of the Alawîn, and have camels ready for them on their arrival. I need hardly say that they had not mentioned the fact that I should also want some camels, and I saw that unless I took prompt action I stood a very good chance of being beaten in the race after all. The first thing

to be done was obviously to interview the governor. The actual governor had just died of fever, but the officer commanding the troops was acting in his place. He, however, was still in bed, and was not likely to be up for several hours. It was very trying to be forced to remain inactive, knowing as I did that the other party could not be many hours behind me. Early in the afternoon their baggage-train did arrive, and, to my great relief, a few minutes later, the acting governor walked into my tent. He was a deadly pale young man, with dull sunken eyes, and his head wrapped up in a shepherd's-plaid shawl. He was very pleased to see me in Akabah, he said; to which I replied with great truth that I was very glad to see him. There was something about this young man which made me think that the sooner the villainy began the better he would be pleased, so, without troubling much about formalities, I told him that I wanted to get off before the other party, and that I had brought with me from England a very beautiful carriage-clock (clock produced), which

I intended to give him. His Excellency thanked me for the present, and said that I need have no fear about the other party getting off before me, as he had received my letter (I had never written one) at the same time as theirs, and had ordered camels for us both; if by any chance, he ingenuously added, only camels enough for one party should arrive, of course they must be shared between the two. This I strongly objected to, urging that as we had both written at the same time, and I had arrived first, I ought to have first pick of the camels; but the best of us have our faults, and even this excellent gentleman was still burdened with a remnant of conscience, and could not quite make up his mind to help me in this piece of rascality.

In the course of the afternoon the geologists arrived, and pitched their camp a few hundred yards from ours. The camels and the Alawîn sheikh were still conspicuous by their absence, and there was nothing to be done but wait patiently for his arrival. Luckily the time did not hang heavily on my hands. I had spent the morning in making

inquiries about the inhabitants, and interviewing the more promising of them, with a view to selecting one of them to take charge of the mercurial barometer and keep a record of its readings while I was up the valley. A glance at the rank and file of the garrison showed me that they were quite hopeless, while the governor's sleepy, sensual eyes convinced me that, even if he had the intelligence to read the barometer, he could never be depended on to do it at regular times. The second in command was a fine, manly-looking fellow, with a pleasant smile and a loud voice; a man whom I felt that I could trust as far as his capacities went, but about as well fitted for nice work as a sledge-hammer for mending watches.

"Is not there any one else," I asked, "whom I have not seen?"

Yes, I had not yet seen Hammid Effendi. Hammid Effendi was soon trotted out and presented to me. A pale, thin man, of about thirty, with a turn-up nose and a round, prominent forehead, downcast eyes and an oily manner.

"That is the sort of man I like to kick," said Peacocke, as he appeared.

"And that is the man for the barometer," I said at the same moment.

I never thoroughly understood what Hammid Effendi's official position at Akabah was, but I fancy that he must have been a sort of orderly-room clerk to the garrison; at any rate one of his duties was the drawing up of agreements between the Alawîn and the pilgrims, or any other travellers who wanted to pass through their territory. It is a curious state of affairs that an official of a Mohammedan government should be employed to draw up a formal agreement between a good Musselman going to visit the shrine of his prophet and the professional robbers who claim the right of pillaging him, but so it is.

Having made up my mind that Hammid was my man, I at once produced the barometer, and began to instruct him in its use. After a few hours' practice he had thoroughly mastered the mysteries of the vernier, writing down the readings correctly every time; but

my greatest difficulty was in getting him to set it exactly level with the top of the mercury. To begin with, he seemed wholly incapable of judging when his own eye was level with it, and it took a great many hours of patient practice before I felt that he could be trusted. I had little doubt that when he had once mastered it he would give me the correct readings. He did not understand the instrument well enough to invent imaginary ones, and as I told him that I should pay him by results, and should know at a glance if he had read it correctly or not, I felt sure that his cupidity, which was oozing from every pore of his greasy skin, would ensure his doing his best.

It was past eight in the evening when Hammid Jad, the sheikh of the Alawîn, and his retinue rode into Akabah. It was an imposing sight as they filed past the campfires, mounted on their gaunt, gaudily-decked dromedaries, their long guns slung over their shoulders, and their silver scabbards flashing in the firelight. They looked neither to the right nor left, but marched straight for the

governor's quarters. Anxious as I was to talk to the sheikh, I felt that any sign of anxiety on my part would be fatal, so even at the risk of letting the other party have the first word, I determined to wait till the sheikh chose to call on me. As it turned out I was wrong in this, as Major Kitchener, in his character of an Egyptian official, managed to produce an effect on the sheikh which all my bribes and arguments were powerless to remove, when, at half-past eleven in the night, he came to my tent. As he had come without the camels, which would now have to be sent for, the precaution of the geologists in sending forward to secure them had been thrown away; in fact they had done us a good turn, as but for them I should have had to send for Hammid Jad, and had to wait a couple of days for his arrival. He was a fine-looking old man, not very tall, but very stately and graceful in his movements, and with a long snow-white beard which diverted one's attention from his rather coarse face and little greedy, restless eyes. He was smoking a cigar

when he entered—evidently the result of his interview with my rivals—but that did not prevent him taking a good handful of cigarettes when the box was handed round.

After the usual formalities we came to business. I was not in the slightest hurry, I said; Akabah was a charming place, and I did not care how long I stayed there, but I had my own private reasons for wishing to leave it before the other party of Englishmen. If they stayed here a week, let him arrange that I should set off in six days, and he should have his reward. At this speech, Hammid Jad looked very mournful. The one wish of his life, he said, was to please me, but alas! it was impossible to grant my request. He had given his word to the others that they should leave on Monday morning, and he could not break his word. The discussion was a very long one, and the cigarette-box was empty, and Petrōs thoroughly tired of making coffee, before we parted for the night. So far we had settled nothing. Hammid Jad would not promise to have camels ready for me

before Monday, and I would not agree to take his camels at all, unless he got me off before the other party.

"I will see you again to-morrow," I said, as he took his leave.

"Inshaalah!" he replied with a fervour which would have put an archbishop to the blush.

"Well, Najm, what is the meaning of all this?" I asked as soon as the old robber had gone.

"I think, sar, Captain Kitchen frighten this people," was his answer.

So I tumbled into bed racking my brain for some means of counteracting "this people's" fright. My position was rather an awkward one; had I been able to play the part of an English officer, the forerunner of an avenging army, I should probably have produced just as good an effect as could Major Kitchener with his tarbush, but an English officer was just the one thing which I could not be. It was an English officer who was expected by the Turkish Government, and from the information I had

received before leaving, I could not doubt that the Turkish Government were serious in their intention of stopping the survey, and if such were the case, nothing would be easier than for them to give private orders to the governor of Akabah to stop me. I had, therefore, nothing but money and arguments to fall back on, and of these two commodities I infinitely preferred spending the latter.

Najm was right as far as he went in saying that Major Kitchener had succeeded in frightening Hammid Jad, but it was only when it was too late that I discovered the chief cause of our being delayed. When two such rascals as Hammid Jad and Hammid Effendi have much business to do together, it may be taken for granted that a good many little transactions take place which will not bear the light of day, and it may also be safely assumed that the cleverest of the two rascals gets a good deal of power over his accomplice. I do not know what particular villainies these two were in the habit of committing, but certain it is that

the orderly-room clerk had got the robber chief completely under his thumb.

Now Akabah is rather a dull place; it contains only one house, and the next-door neighbour is a hundred miles away in a bee-line across the desert; under these circumstances Hammid Effendi looks with particular favour on the visits and flesh-pots of chance travellers, and naturally does his best to prolong their stay at Akabah. Having Hammid Jad under his thumb, he lets that worthy understand pretty plainly that the camels are not to be ready till he, the Effendi, has completed the round of their cooks' collection of *menus* and exhausted the fund of impromptus which he has been evolving and storing up since the last travelling season.

Early next morning Peacocke started off to sketch the lower part of the valley. I had to stop in camp to make my final arrangements with Hammid Jad. Being ignorant then of the adverse influence of Hammid Effendi, I confined myself to trying to counteract that of Major Kitchener.

After a very long discussion I succeeded in getting out of the sheikh a promise of three good dromedaries for the following morning. This was the thin end of the wedge fairly in, and I at once tried to drive it home by suggesting that I should also have a camel to carry a small tent, in case, as I innocently suggested, I should chance to be benighted, but the wily old robber was too sharp for me, and swore by all his gods that there was not a camel to be had within ten hours' march of Akabah. This was a gross perversion of the truth, but still it could not be disputed, and as my Tawarah Bedwin were afraid of so much as showing their noses in the Arabah, there was nothing for it but to be content with such small mercies as were vouchsafed to me, and agree to make my excursion on Saturday and start off on Monday morning.

Having settled my business with the sheikh, I had next to turn my attention again to Hammid Effendi and the barometer, and repeat the lesson of yesterday, which, however, I found that he had remembered

wonderfully well. Never until I had the pleasure of making this estimable person's acquaintance did I realize how many things are required to read a barometer properly. First of all, there is the pencil to write down the observations with, and such a thing as a pencil is not to be got in Akabah. Of course I gave him one. He was profuse in his thanks, and walked off assuring me that, until I returned, his one thought would be the care of the instrument. Just as he was getting out of the tent-door, an idea seemed to strike him.

"Ya khawajah," (Oh, gentleman) he said, "supposing I was to drop the pencil in the sand, I might not be able to find it, and then what should I do? Also I might make a mistake in the figures which I write down, and as I should like them to be well and clearly written, I should want to write them over again, and alas! I have no paper like that which you have given me."

I gave him half a dozen pencils and a dozen sheets of foolscap, and off he went saying that now he had got everything that

he wanted, and I should see how well he did my work. I saw no more of him till I had finished dinner, when he appeared at the tent-door, holding his hand to his heart, and hoping that all the blessings of heaven might fall on my head; in his hand he carried the six lead pencils.

"Ya khawajah," he began; "a great misfortune has happened to me. It is as I feared; I have dropped that pencil which you gave me in the sand, and I cannot find it, although I have searched for it on my hands and knees for more than an hour. When I could not find it, I said I will not trouble the gentleman, but I will cut one of the others. It was only then that I remembered that I have got no knife. See, the pencils are still uncut."

A penknife was produced from my store, and off he went full of the usual protestations. Next morning the first person whom I saw on leaving my tent was Hammid Effendi.

"May your day be happy," he began. (It did not seem to be having a very good

start.) He could think of nothing, he went on to say, but that barometer, and as he had lain awake during the night, he had remembered that I had told him to read it in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.

"Yes," I said, "after the hours of morning and of evening prayer, and at noon."

Here he looked very serious. He was a very strict Mohammedan, he said, and it often troubled him greatly that he could not tell the exact hour for these prayers. The high mountains hid the sun as he was rising and setting in this place, and during the month of rain, which was coming on, sometimes it was not to be seen at all; and alas! he had no watch.

My store was again dived into, and a watch produced, and off the Effendi went in his usual fashion. His wish of the morning was fulfilled, for I did not see him again that day, and next morning I went out of camp at sunrise, and did not return till long after sunset, but no sooner had I got off my dromedary, than before me stood my perse-

cutor, pouring blessings on my head with all his accustomed fervour. His mind was still running on how he could best do my work, he said, and he thought that good as the pencils which I had given him undoubtedly were, it would be better to write down what he read in ink, and alas! he had no ink. The ink was produced and he departed, apparently quite satisfied this time that he had everything which was necessary to carry on his important work. Next morning, however, he was at his post as usual, this time with a very long face. A very great misfortune had happened to him; he had put his watch in the same pocket with the knife I had given him, and the glass had got broken. Now the hands might get broken, too, and how could he tell the time? If I would give him a watch with a silver face, then he would be sure to know the time. I had not got a hunting-watch with me, so had at last to refuse to grant his request. I looked at the watch, however, and found the glass just cracked across.

In the afternoon I took the barometer to

his house to hang it on the wall. His room was a small and dark one, lighted by a window covered with lattice-work, and I offered the barometer to different positions on the walls, to get it in the best-lighted place. This gave the Effendi a new and brilliant idea. His room, he said, was very dark during the rainy season, and perhaps he might not be able to read the instrument correctly, but if I would give him a pound of candles, then he would be certain of always being able to see it well, and his one ambition was to please me.

On the following morning I left Akabah, and was delivered from my tormentor, but it would have been amusing to wait and see how many more things he would have discovered to be necessary for the proper reading of a barometer.

CHAPTER VI.

Description of the Wady el Arabah.

As I have said, Hammid Effendi having no objection to my going into the country as long as I left my cook and my tents at Akabah, Hammid Jad lent me three of his own dromedaries, and at daylight on the morning of December 1st I started off on my first exploration of the Wady el Arabah.

Now, having travelled hard for three weeks in order to see this place, I suppose that, having got there, I shall be expected to describe it, and I think the most satisfactory way of doing so is to run the description straight off the reel, and have done with it; begging the more frivolous of my readers (may their shadows never grow less !) to pass on to the next chapter.

As I have said, on approaching the Arabah

from the south, nothing indicates any break in the continuance of the sea. The same ranges of hills which wall in the gulf continue in an unbroken line to the northward, and until the low shingle bank which I have mentioned shows itself above the horizon, it is hard to believe that the sea does not still flow through the long vista of hills which dies away in perspective to the northward, as one knows it does through that which stretches as far as the eye can reach to the south. At the head of the gulf, and for the first few miles up the valley, the range on the east is composed entirely of granite. That on the west has a granite base, overlaid in turn by red sandstone, limestone, and chalk.

On reaching the shingle bank which runs across the head of the gulf, one sees that the battle between land and water, which has raged for hundreds of centuries, for possession of the Arabah, is still drawn. From the middle of February to the end of November, the north-east wind, coming from the land, drives back the water, the level of the sea is lowered and the shingle bank becomes its

boundary. Early in December a change takes place, the cold north-east wind dies away, and its place is taken by moisture-laden gales from the south, and the narrow waters of the gulf which the north wind had driven back below the general level of the sea, are now piled up above it, and above the low bank which for the last nine months has been an impassable barrier. For the time being the battle turns in favour of the sea, and once more it flows over some two miles of the territory which was once all its own. But this same south wind which has helped the sea to its brief victory is but a traitor at heart, and year by year by imperceptible steps it strengthens the barrier which keeps back its parent. No sooner does it touch the limestone ridges of the Tih, and the cold granite peaks from Jabal Haroum to Barkeyeh, than it gives to them the moisture which it has stolen from the sea. Now of all the great generals which the world has seen, there has been none to equal water in caution and sagacity. "Never allow yourself to be beaten in detail" is its motto, and so

its millions of little streamlets, each of which a child could stop with its wooden spade, make haste to combine; one joins its neighbour, and they join two more, and so on till a torrent is formed more powerful than even the sea itself; tumbling and rolling and sweeping down the hill-side, it carries with it rocks, and mud, and stones, and more than them, the little seeds which when they grow hold the mud and stones together—and year by year another inch is added to the heap in the valley-bed, which even the sea is powerless to wash away. This is the process which for hundreds of centuries has been going on, in a greater or less degree, it being probably less actively at work now than during any previous era. Its results are evident on all sides. At the mouth of each of the many ravines which empty themselves into the Arabah are to be seen *talus*, or fan-shaped mounds of *débris*, over which the torrents diverge to the right and left; the one part of the stream flowing directly towards the sea, the other taking at first a northerly course, and having to wind round the foot of its own *talus* before

it can rejoin the parent stream. As would be expected, the upper portions of these *talus* are covered with the larger fragments which are deposited when the force of the torrent first begins to abate, the middle portion by smaller fragments, and the lower parts by the comparatively small pebbles which are all that the now enfeebled current can roll along. The *débris* slopes once passed, the muddy torrent finds itself on the flat silt bed of the valley, and as it meanders sluggishly along towards the sea, it loses the power of carrying with it even the light particles of mud which are all that it now retains of its spoil from the mountain-side; and so year by year fresh rocks are rolled from the ravines on to the tops of the *talus*, and fresh mud deposited in the bed of the valley. What goes on now above water in the Wady el Arabah, went on, on a larger scale,[1] in the gulf whose place it has taken. The same rocks, carried down by the winter torrents, were deposited on the beach, the same pebbles just floated a yard

[1] The submersion of this district would of course increase the rainfall, and consequently the water action.

or two into the sea, and the same mud carried into the gulf by the muddy torrent, and then left to settle.

During the course of ages these *débris* heaps have increased in size, till many of them stretch nearly across the valley, making the course of its narrow bed extremely tortuous. Now it is evident that if two large ravines happened to open into the Arabah exactly opposite to each other, their *talus* would meet and a barrier be formed right across the valley. At a point thirteen miles from the head of the gulf this actually occurs; the Wady el Amrah disgorging its refuse from the limestone ranges of the west exactly opposite the Wady el Methedi, from the mouth of which rolls out the granite *débris* of the eastern range. In the centre of the valley the two *talus* meet, and the first watershed of the Arabah is formed, 252 feet above the sea-level. This ridge is called by the natives Mekreh Hadîd.

I have said that the western range had a granite base overlaid with sandstone, limestone, and chalk.

Now I have heard it stated that the filling

up of what for the sake of convenience I shall call the Gulf of Galilee, is entirely due to upheaval. As it may be taken as practically out of the question that this narrow strip of valley should be upheaved and the mountains on either side of it left undisturbed, it follows then that, if the upheaval theory be correct, the bed of the valley ought to follow approximately the run of these strata, and that, having found granite at the base of the hill, sandstone half-way up, and limestone and chalk at the top, when we were at the sea-level, we ought to find the same thing in other parts of the valley. If, on the other hand, we have simply climbed up the mountain-side on a ramp of gravel which has been piled up against it, we should expect, on reaching a height of 250 feet, at all events to find ourselves nearing the top of the granite and the bottom of the red sandstone stratum. This is exactly what we see at Mekreh Hadîd; the summit of a granite peak just shows itself above the ground, near the mouth of the Wady el Amrah, and the foot of the main western range is composed of sandstone. I think

this, in conjunction with the self-evident water-origin of the various *talus*, is sufficient evidence that the filling up of the gulf is due, not to upheaval, but to silting, and in describing the rest of the valley I shall therefore take this for granted.

At a distance of eighteen miles from Akabah i.e. five miles to the north of Mekreh Hadîd, the bed of the valley has fallen again to 137 feet above the sea-level, and as no large water-courses here open into the Arabah to the east or west, no *talus* are formed, and its surface is almost level. This part of the valley during the rainy season is the receptacle of an enormous quantity of water, receiving as it does not only that flowing from the northern slopes of Mekreh Hadîd but the whole drainage of the valley for the next thirty miles. The water thus collected having no outlet can only be dispersed by evaporation, and the result is a deep deposit of silt strongly impregnated with salt. This salt, crystallized in the sun, covers the whole surface of the ground in dry weather, and the wells in this neighbourhood, at Ain Ghudian,

for instance, contain water so salt as to be hardly drinkable, even by persons who have become accustomed to the brackish water of this district. While admitting the possibility of this saline deposit being the result of the evaporation of salt-laden streams from the neighbouring mountains, I confess that to my mind this explanation seems hardly adequate to account for so considerable a deposit, especially when the fact is taken into consideration that by far the greater part of the water supply comes from the eastern granite range, which I should imagine to be particularly poor in salts. On the other hand, we have only to imagine the sea to have once flowed through this valley, and a deep saline deposit follows as a matter of course, the depth of the deposit depending on the amount of silting which had taken place in the upper parts of the valley, before Mekreh Hadîd was closed.

For the next twenty miles the *talus*, which are so conspicuous in the lower part of the valley, nearly crossing its whole width as they do, are confined to its edges, the centre being

filled up with a flat bed of mud, down the centre of which runs a ridge of sand dunes. As this may be taken as an argument against the *talus* or silt theory, and in favour of upheaval, it may be as well to point out that it is quite compatible with the former. In the part of the valley south of Mekreh Hadîd, the torrents, having deposited their rocks and pebbles on their respective *talus*, are, it is true, considerably retarded in their course over the comparatively flat bed of silt which lines the trough of the valley, still this trough has a very decided fall, and any mud which is still held in suspension is ultimately carried out to sea. To the north of Mekreh Hadîd the case is different; not one particle of the countless tons of mud which have been carried into the marsh of El Ta'abah ever escapes from it, and thus, while the stony slopes are piled up at no greater speed than their brethren to the south, the mud accumulates at a far greater rate, and consequently gaining on the *talus* is gradually covering them up.

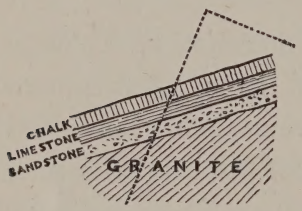
As at the Wady el Amrah the deposited

gravel had covered up the granite, and raised us to the foot of the red sandstone stratum, so in this neighbourhood it covers up the red sandstone, and brings us to the foot of the overlying limestone formation, which holds good till some thirty miles further to the north, the deposit, aided by the natural dip of the strata, has in turn buried it and left above the surface nothing but the superincumbent chalk.

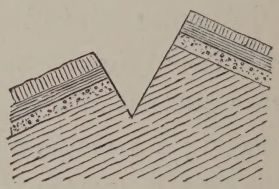
Ten miles beyond the marsh of El Ta'abah and twenty-eight miles from Akabah, we came abreast of a very remarkable hill called Nawibi; its shape at once attracts attention, rising as it does in three distinct steps like the summit of a huge step pyramid. A closer examination shows that while the base of the mountain is granite like the rest of the range, its summit is undoubtedly sandstone, at an elevation far above that of the corresponding strata in the western range, and further, that, whereas the stratified rocks on the west dip to the north-west, the strata on this mountain dip to the eastward. As the valley is ascended this phenomenon is frequently re-

peated, with the addition that the sandstone is usually overlaid by limestone. This, I think, points strongly to the conclusion that the Arabah is the result of a cataclasm which, tearing open the huge crevice by bodily uplifting the eastern portion of the plateau, at the same time gave it a tilt to the eastward.

The accompanying rough sections may perhaps help to convey my meaning. No. 1



No. 1.



No. 2.

shows the plateau before the catastrophe, the dotted line showing the direction of the upheaval, while No. 2 shows its condition after the fault was formed, but before the chalk was worn away.

That a considerable amount of heat would be evolved during this tremendous display of force, is more than probable, and the sudden cooling by the consequent inrush of waters

on the superheated rocks, may account for the peculiar brittleness which is noticeable in the lower strata of the limestone.

At a distance of thirty miles from Akabah a large wady, El Aheimeh, opening on to the east side of the valley produces again a noticeable *talus* which stretches nearly across the valley and almost joins the smaller *talus* of the Wady Musaib on the opposite side, thus leaving a very narrow channel for the outflow of the water, which is here collected in considerable quantities, as not only do a number of large water-courses open into the Arabah immediately to the north of these two wadys, but a great portion of the torrent from the Aheimeh itself flows to the northward, parts of the ground in that direction being below the level of the channel between the wadys Aheimeh and Musaib. The result is an accumulation of water, and a consequent deposit of silt, which during the rainy season is almost impassable.

Fifteen miles further to the northward, i.e. forty-five miles from Akabah, a limestone promontory, called Rishi, runs out into the

valley from the western range, reducing its breadth from over five to under two miles. It so happens that an exceptionally large water-course, the Wady el Houar, empties itself into the narrowest part of the strait thus formed. Judging by the amount of *débris* deposited by the other and smaller wadys, the *talus* from this torrent would, under favourable circumstances, stretch across the full breadth of the Arabah at its widest part; here, cooped up as it is in a narrow gorge, it is unable to extend laterally and consequently piles itself up vertically far faster than the others, with the result that at its lowest part it has reached a thickness of 930 feet above the sea-level.

That this gorge of Rishi was once a channel through which the sea flowed, can hardly be doubted; the original strait, however, must have been extremely narrow, probably barely 1000 yards across, and with the large torrent of El Houar pouring its yearly tons of *débris* into it, its existence could not, geologically speaking, have been long. This would undoubtedly be the first barrier formed

across the Gulf of Galilee, that of Mekreh Hadîd only growing up thousands of years after the Dead Sea had been shut off from its source of supply. This so far coincides with the opinion of certain *savants* that Ain Ghudiân (at the head of the marsh at El Ta'abah), is identical with the Ezion Geber, from which Solomon's fleet set sail, and which would therefore presumably be at the head of the gulf, but it is hard to believe that in the short 3000 years which have elapsed since Solomon's time so formidable an obstacle as the 250 feet of gravel collected at Mekreh Hadîd could have been deposited, not to speak of the gulf which would have to be filled up before high-water mark was reached.

I have said that this strait of Rishi is caused by a limestone promontory running out from the western range, and I am so far justified in my statement, that the eastern and western extremities of this ridge are plainly and visibly limestone; the central saddle of the ridge, however, is covered with an alluvial deposit lined with fragments of

limestone, and having no means of ascertaining for certain what is underneath, I am forced, by the absence of any wady or water-course which would be equal to filling up the gap between them, to the conclusion that the two limestone extremities are connected by a ridge of similar material. It is of course within the bounds of probability that the eastern extremity may have been an island in the gulf, and that by some process—even that trump card of the bewildered geologist, upheaval—the intervening space, or western passage, may have become filled up, but I must say I am strongly disinclined to take this view. I have dwelt thus at length on the formation of what may at first sight appear an unimportant point, from the fact that whereas the true valley has across it a barrier 930 feet in height, the saddle of this promontory is only 675 feet above the sea-level; and if therefore a canal be ever made, it would be through this promontory that it would undoubtedly be cut.

The promontory and strait of Rishi once passed, the valley widens out to ten miles,

falling steadily and rapidly to the southward, till at a point nineteen miles beyond the saddle of Rishi, and sixty-two from Akabah, it has again reached the sea-level, in the bed of the Wady Jeraideh, a broad water-course which takes its rise in the Tih plateau, joins the Arabah, and runs along its western edge till it runs into the Jeib, whose name it then takes.

The strata on the western range of the Arabah, besides dipping backward to the west, also incline to the north—the Tih being a segment of a dome—and this northerly dip, which in conjunction with the accumulation of *débris* has in turn buried the granite and the sandstone, also causes the limestone to disappear soon after Rishi is passed, leaving only the chalk upon the surface, and it is through this chalk that the bed of the Lehyanah, Jerafeh, and Jeraideh runs.

Hitherto we have had water-courses pouring out of granite, sandstone, or limestone hills, and discharging mounds of the *débris* which they have collected in their course, and thus year by year raising the level of their

own beds. Here on the eastern side of the valley the same still holds good, and springing out of the granite mountains in the midst of which stands Mount Hor we see a long series of gravel slopes inclining towards the west. On the western side, however, exactly the reverse takes place. The soft chalk of the western range, breaking up under the action of water, instead of accumulating at the mouth of the wadys, is worn away by these torrents, and instead of raised mounds we find deep cuttings. Thus here, as at Rishi, owing to the great accumulation of *débris* on the eastern side of the valley, the lowest line is to be found, not in any part of the original gulf, but on the slopes of the mountains which formed its sides.

As any interest which is attached to the Wady el Arabah must be in connection with the scheme for cutting a canal through it, it may be as well to glance at those points to the advantage and disadvantage of such a scheme which this brief description of it has called up.

To begin with the most important question

of levels. About these I shall merely state the bare facts, leaving more competent persons than myself to draw their own conclusions. The Wady el Arabah may be divided, as far as levels are concerned, into six parts. (1.) From the head of the gulf to the summit of the Mekreh Hadîd, a distance of thirteen miles, in which a height of 250 feet is gained. (2.) From Mekreh Hadîd to El Ta'abah, five miles, at the end of which the level has fallen to 137 feet. (3.) The marsh of El Ta'abah. (4.) An ascent of twenty-five miles from El Ta'abah to the saddle of Rishi, 675 feet. (5.) A descent of 675 feet in twenty miles between Rishi and the Wady Jeraideh. (6.) The district below the sea-level between Wady Jeraideh and the Dead Sea.

Next comes the question of the formation which would be encountered in cutting a canal. Trusting that I have made clear the arguments in favour of the theory that the Wady el Arabah is a huge fissure filled up with *débris*, I shall take it for granted that any cutting made in the southern part of the

valley would be through alluvial deposits, as indeed it would be through the whole length of the valley were the eastern side followed.

In the bed of the Wady Jerafeh, the action of the water having removed the alluvial deposits of the surface, the substratum of chalk is laid bare. In this part therefore we have the direct evidence of our senses that it would be through this formation that the cutting would have to be made. In the neighbourhood of Akabah, we see as I have said, that the western range, having a granite base, is composed of strata of red sandstone, limestone, and chalk; and as we ascend the valley we see that each of these formations, in turn, is buried beneath the surface till at the Wady Jerafeh only the chalk is left exposed. At Rishi we find a saddle, covered with an alluvial deposit, lying between two limestone hills. As there is no watercourse in this neighbourhood of sufficient size to have piled up this saddle with its *débris*, we can only conclude that it is part of the spur of which the two hills form the extremities, and as these extremities are limestone,

it may be taken for granted that the centre is of the same formation. As red sandstone underlies the limestone in other parts of the valley, and is seen doing so opposite to this place in the eastern range, it may be fairly argued that the same thing occurs in the saddle of Rishi, and therefore that if any cutting were made through this promontory it would be for the most part through limestone, and that possibly its lower portion might reach down to the underlying sandstone. It may therefore be safely concluded that any cutting made from sea-level to sea-level, would be for about thirty miles through gravel, for about fifteen through limestone, and for another fifteen through chalk.

There is one other question on which I have incidentally touched in this description, viz. the effect which would be produced on the climate by re-establishing the Gulf of Galilee. The rainfall, I have said, was probably greater when this gulf existed, and the re-establishment of the old order of things would in all probability reproduce the original climatic conditions, bringing an increased rainfall and

consequently an increased annual deposit of *débris* from the various mountain torrents. It may be urged that the same causes which have led to the filling up of the gulf would work in the same direction on a canal, and be a great annual source of expense. I grant that this would be the case were the original course of the gulf to be followed, and were the canal to be carried through the narrow Strait of Rishi, and past the mouth of the Wady el Houar. I believe this wady to be the sole cause of the silting up of the Arabah; as long as the Strait of Rishi was open the evaporation of the great inland sea which stretched from Mount Hor to the Lebanon would cause a constant current from the Red Sea, and the muddy waters from the hills, instead of depositing their burdens in the Arabah would be kept in agitation till they found rest in the deep lake which covered the northern Ghor. Rishi once closed this current was stopped, and mud rapidly began to be deposited at the mouths of the valleys. Be this as it may, it cannot be disputed that during the period in which the Wady el

Houar has piled up 930 feet of *débris*, the Wadys El Amrah and Methedi, which between them have contributed to form the only other barrier, have only accumulated 250 feet, and that therefore in avoiding the Wady el Houar we avoid by far the greatest source of danger from silting.

CHAPTER VII.

Plan of action—Start up the wady—Sheikh Salaam—His weak point—Mekreh Hadîd—A bad look-out—Not as bad as it looked—A dromedary-race—Where is Anthonōs?—Finding the time—Hammid Jad in a hurry—Anthonōs *redivivus*—"Something to remember you by"—The Bedwin character.

Not knowing when I might be stopped, I thought that the first thing to be done was to make sure of getting *some* information, and to push on at all hazards, and as quickly as possible, to the watershed. Once there I could take my time, and work carefully down the valley till I was stopped by an emissary of the Sublime Porte. Of course, in case I should be prevented from making the return survey, I wanted to make the preliminary one as accurate as possible, especially as far as the levels were concerned, and accordingly settled that, while Peacocke pushed steadily

forward with his route sketch, Cash and I should work up the valley, in steps, with the aneroids. We commenced operations on the beach at seven o'clock on the morning of December 1st, by reading the three aneroids at high-water mark, and noting their differences. Leaving No. 3 in charge of Cash, who had orders to follow in an hour's time, I mounted my dromedary with Nos. 1 and 2, and started off at a sharp trot for the western side of the valley. After a fifty-minutes' ride I dismounted, laid out the aneroids, let them rest for five minutes, and read them, Cash at the same moment reading his on the beach. After an hour's wait Cash arrived, very glad of a rest after fifty minutes' bumping. The aneroids were compared again, and off I started to read the aneroids again, after an hour's interval, at the second station. In this way we worked the whole way up the valley; and if any approach to accuracy is to be obtained with aneroids, I ought to have obtained it. Not only were the aneroids at the forward station read at precisely the same moment of time as that at the back

station, and therefore, presumably under similar atmospheric conditions, but the three aneroids were always read together at each station, and these readings compared, and their differences noted and allowed for. Of course the thermometer was also read and the usual correction made for temperature. It may interest other travellers to learn that this method gave an error of ninety feet in excess of the actual height at the watershed. "A very good result, too," say such of my friends as have had much experience with aneroids. Still, I confess I was disappointed with it, and I cannot see to this day why the method by which I worked up the valley did not give me a very near approach to accuracy.

Behind me on the dromedary sat a shock-headed young Bedwin of some twelve years, a most objectionable little boy, whom I got rid of at the earliest opportunity. Peacocke, who had done about five miles of the valley on the previous day, had pushed straight on to the place where he had left off, and a nephew of Hammid Jad's, who had been

told off to accompany us, had started with him. Whether my small companion thought me rather bad company or not, I cannot say, but he was most persistent in his efforts to force me to join Peacocke and the sheikh. "See, there is the gentleman," he would say, pointing to Peacocke, engaged in the genial occupation of counting his paces, in the distance. "Quite true," I would reply, as I sent the dromedary along in the opposite direction. Then would follow in a string: "Give me backsheesh—It is getting very late—We are a long way from home—Give me a cigarette—It is time for breakfast," and so on, till I stopped for my hour's halt, during the whole of which he kept up a perpetual string of exhortations to move on. As we neared my fourth station his spirits rose a little, for about a quarter of a mile in front of us he saw Peacocke and the sheikh just settling down to lunch, but my hour was up, and to his infinite disgust I made the dromedary kneel down, and getting off, spread out the aneroids. "Breakfast, gentleman, breakfast," he said, almost in tears;

so I sent him off with a message to the sheikh to send me over a little bread and cheese. In ten minutes he returned without the lunch, but with a message from the sheikh to the effect that if I wanted my lunch I had better come and get it. This was a little more than I could stand, so expressing my sentiments pretty freely on a leaf of my note-book, I sent it off to Peacocke. Perhaps I expressed my sentiments rather too freely, for in five minutes appeared, not only the bread and cheese, but Peacocke, looking very hot, and followed by the sheikh and Anthonōs, whom I had believed to be safe at home, but whom, it seemed, Najm had insisted on sending after us with a camel-load of provisions. I had not seen Peacocke start in the morning, and did not know who was with him, and was therefore not much pleased now to find that it was the one man of Hammid Jad's relations to whom I had a particular objection. He was certainly a most disagreeable-looking man. I think I can best describe his face by saying that it was the exact counterpart of that of the "subject" in Hogarth's picture, "the

Reward of Cruelty," with the exception of a most abominable squint which is wanting in the picture. If I had not been prepossessed by him at our first meeting, the impertinent message which he had just sent me certainly did not tend to improve my opinion of him, and he, on his side, was as cross as a bear at not getting his own way. I have often wondered since what manner of men these Alawîn can have been accustomed to deal with. They may have got into the habit of hectoring and bullying their own pilgrims, but Englishmen are comparatively rare in the Arabah, and Englishwomen even more so, but to judge by their behaviour at first one would have imagined that they had passed their lives in escorting timid and unprotected females to Petra and back. "I do not believe they are Christians at all," Sheikh Salaam confided to Najm, towards the end of the journey, in the course of a conversation about us. "Christians always do what they are told and give when they are asked, but these people do exactly as they like and give nothing."

As soon as we had finished lunch Sheikh

Salaam said that it was time to be going home again, and went to fetch the camels, upon which Peacocke with great promptitude started off on foot up the valley. He, it seems, had already found out a weak point in Salaam's armour, which I had yet to discover, namely, his mortal dread of losing one of us. He certainly was not actuated by any feeling of personal affection, at this period at all events; nor, I am quite certain, was he moved by any feeling of honour or duty. It must then have been fear, but I have no idea how he would have been punished or who would have punished him if we had come to an untimely end. "Where is the gentleman?" he asked, when he returned with the camels. "Gone up the valley," I answered, and off started Salaam at his best speed, in the extremely vain hope that he was going to lead back Peacocke like a naughty child who *will* play in the field where the mad bull lives. In the meanwhile Cash had arrived, and we had read the aneroids, and, amidst most vehement protestation on the part of the objectionable

small boy, I started off alone at my dromedary's best pace for what appeared to be the lowest part of the valley to the front.

The lowest part, however, did not look half as low as I should have liked it to have done. The ground, which near the head of the gulf had looked so flat, had a slight incline, and in the course of a mile or two this began to mount up. At five miles from Akabah we had already risen fifty-six feet, and before me rose a hill which there was evidently no chance of avoiding, and which from this point only looked the beginning of worse things to come. I followed a water-course up the side of this slope, and at the end of an hour found myself 250 feet above the sea-level. "By Jove! this looks bad," I said to myself as I noted the reading. "If we have risen 250 feet in thirteen miles, what shall we be at when we get to the watershed?" I seemed, however, to be pretty well at the top of the rise, and it was very tantalizing having to wait an hour for Cash just now when I was so anxious to push on and see what was ahead. I had not

been waiting long when Peacocke caught me up, and said that he would push ahead as far as he could and bring me back an account of what he saw. He had not been gone many minutes when up came Sheikh Salaam in a very bad temper, complaining that Peacocke would not come back when he was asked, and that when he had returned to me he had found me gone also, and that he had been searching for me everywhere. Then, pointing to the setting sun, he said we ought to have been moving homewards hours ago; now we should get caught in the dark; he did not know what might not happen. It really was getting rather late, so I wrote a line on a strip of paper, and sent him with it after Peacocke, who presently appeared with the good news that after another half-mile the ground began to fall, and that we were therefore on a watershed. Could it be *the* watershed? was the question which suggested itself to both of us. This very marked ridge was wholly unnoticed in any map, the valley being here shown as a perfectly flat plain. No one who had ever been here, we

said, could have failed to notice it, and from this we jumped to the conclusion that no one, that is to say, no map-maker, had been here at all.

We trotted home at a good pace, and at about eight o'clock found ourselves among the palms of Akabah. I happened to be leading at the time, and whether Sheikh Salaam thought he ought to show himself in front, or whether he merely wanted to show off the paces of his dromedary, I do not know, but anyhow, giving a loud Arrah! he shot alongside of me. I naturally pushed on too, and we were having a very pretty little race, when something happened—to this day I have never discovered what—and my rein snapped short off close to my beast's head, and Salaam and his dromedary rolled head over heels among the stones. Of course I could not stop, so sailed gaily away towards camp, causing rather a sensation when I arrived there at full trot, alone and bridleless. "Where are the others?" rose in a chorus round me; but before I had time to explain they came to tell their own tale. "But

Anthonōs!" was the next exclamation, "is not he with you?" "No," I said; "I sent him home after lunch." Anthonōs, who had started a good five hours ago, had not yet arrived, and great was the excitement in consequence; the unfortunate Salaam, who had no voice in the matter, getting roundly abused for having allowed him to go home alone. Taking advantage of the excitement, I slipped off quietly to the beach with Cash and the three aneroids, which I laid out at high-water mark and proceeded to read, to the great bewilderment of a group of Bedwin who were sitting round the camp-fire on the shore. What strange people these Englishmen were to be sure, to bring their gold watches (they always called them *saah*) down to the beach and lay them on the sand! The five minutes which I always gave the aneroids to settle was just up when down came Abdullah Effendi, the second in command, with a soldier and a lantern, and looking extremely cross. "What was I doing down there?" he asked; "did not I know that it was very dangerous to go about alone at

night." I had come to see what time it was, I innocently replied, hardly able to keep my countenance at the absurdity of my answer. There is nothing like good sheer, downright nonsense to close an argument, and poor Abdullah was completely puzzled.

The excitement about Anthonōs was still in full swing when I returned to camp, and the general opinion seemed to be that he had been robbed and murdered. I myself thought it was not unlikely that he had been robbed, but a Bedwin has too much respect for his own neck to commit murder if he can get what he wants without it, and as I did not think Anthonōs was a likely man to commit such an imprudence as showing fight, I was able to sit down to my dinner without much loss of appetite on his account. I had just settled down when that usually sedate old robber Hammid Jad stumped into the tent in a violent hurry. Now to catch an Arab chief in a hurry is a piece of good luck which does not happen to a man twice in his life-time. I am happy to say that I was equal to the occasion. I wished him a good

evening, to which he had to reply "God grant you a good evening." Then I hoped that he was well, and he thanked God that he was well, and said he hoped (which he did not) that I was well. Then I thanked God that I was well, to which, not to be beaten in piety by a Christian, he replied, with evident impatience, that God was indeed merciful. Then I went on to his family; but the old man could stand it no longer, and, breaking through all rules of etiquette, said, "Very well, thank you," and finished up with an abrupt "Why did you let that man go home alone?" "I knew that I and my party were under your protection," I answered, "and thought that the respect in which you are held throughout the length and breadth of the land would make it safe to travel alone in this valley, even if one was laden with silver and gold." This, I had flattered myself, was rather a smart answer, but the old man was equal to it, and after a moment's thought replied that what I had said was perfectly true. If the man only had the good fortune to meet with Bedwin

he was safe; they would take care of him and bring him home; but, still, he was greatly troubled in his mind for fear he should fall into the hands of any one else. He was just going on, presumably, to explain whom these dreadful people were that he was so afraid of, when we heard a tremendous shouting, followed by roars of laughter, and Anthonōs himself appeared upon the scene to clear up all conjectures. His story was, that as he was riding quietly home his camel had suddenly lain down and no amount of persuasion would induce him to get up again till the party which had been sent out in search had arrived. Najm, however, who had known Anthonōs from his youth, advanced the theory that, replete with a good lunch, it was the rider who had lain down for a little siesta in the sun, and had only been roused by the shouts of the search-party. Be this as it may, the searchers were convinced that they, at all events, had done great things, and ought to be rewarded accordingly, and Abdullah Effendi, the second in command, said that he had sent

them out on his own responsibility, and suggested that a gift of a revolver or double-barrelled gun would be an appropriate recognition of his zeal.

As we had got about as far up the valley as we conveniently could without moving camp, I devoted the next day to writing, or rather, intended to do so; but the knowledge that I was going to leave them, perhaps for ever, in the morning, made my numerous friends and admirers particularly anxious to give me the full benefit of their society during the few remaining hours of my stay. His Excellency the administrator, and Abdullah Effendi, the second in command, called to remind me of the many little acts of kindness which they had performed on my behalf. Hammid Effendi, as I have already hinted, was never very bashful about stating his requirements, but of all my tormentors there was no one who was so anxious to carry away some slight remembrance of me as Hammid Jad. Now Hammid had already had everything, and more than everything, to which he was entitled; he had been paid

for his camels, he had been paid his black mail, and he had been given the customary backsheesh, and I had offered to pay him well if he would send me off before the other party, and this he had professed his inability to do. Now, I had happened to hear on this very morning that there were plenty of camels belonging to him within easy reach of Akabah, and that he might have easily started on Friday had he chosen. This I told him, adding that when people obliged me nothing could surpass my liberality, but that I only gave presents to the people who did so, and that I knew perfectly well that I had only been kept here in order that he and Hammid Effendi might gorge themselves at my expense, and that not one single piastre more would he get out of me. This speech the old man evidently took, as I intended it to be taken, as my ultimatum, for, for the second time forgetting his dignity in my presence, he jumped up in a violent rage, and ran out of the tent. It may be thought, perhaps, that in making this speech I went out of my way to insult the old man,

but I am certain that in order to have any peace, and get my own way among such a bullying, swaggering set of extortioners as he and his tribe were, it was necessary to show my hand at once, and let them clearly understand that I saw through all their tricks, and was fully determined to do exactly as I pleased, and only to pay for services actually rendered. Carrying out this principle, I ended in becoming very friendly with this tribe. During the first few days of my sojourn among them my life was made a positive burden to me by their perpetual demands for backsheesh, and their unceasing attempts to force me to go their way instead of my own, the first being always met by a steady "No," and the second by a supreme indifference; their importunities gradually ceased, and in course of time they learnt that whereas I never gave them anything when they asked for it, I always gave them something when I thought they deserved it, and so got into the habit of doing their best to please me.

Probably no subject has called forth more

nonsense than that of the Bedwin character. Human nature, after all, is pretty much the same all over the world, and human beings may roughly be divided into two classes, gentlemen and the mob. There is but little difference in gentlemen whether they come from England, France, or Zululand; and members of the mob, with slight variations, are also pretty much alike, no matter where they come from. Take an ordinary London waif, street Arab as he is most appropriately called, half-starved, ill-clothed, and brought up in the belief that robbery is the only legitimate means of existence; you have only to put a gun in his hand, take away the policeman, and persuade him that he is a very formidable person, and you have as good a specimen of a Bedwin as you will find in all Arabia. Take a ragged Bedwin boy, clothe him well and give him plenty to eat, teach him that there are better ways of earning one's livelihood than stealing, let him understand the uses of a policeman, and send him to a public school to have the nonsense knocked out of him, and you have an English

gentleman. The fact is the Bedwin is simply a miserably poor man, with a gun in his hand, and wholly ignorant of the majesty of law, who, from being perpetually told that he is a very formidable person, has at last begun to believe it himself. If any one stands up to him he is surprised and indignant, but being very badly armed wisely runs away. If people run away from him, he naturally concludes that they are the weaker party, and as they may have something worth taking he runs after them. The opponents of the Bedwin call him a coward: perhaps he is, but is not bravery more the result of roast beef and plum-pudding than anything else? and are not cowardice and bad circulation, after all, nearly synonymous terms? If not, what is the use of that mysterious "jumping powder" which, I am sorry to say, young men sometimes carry in their flasks?

The admirers of the Bedwin will, I suppose, also disagree with me, and ask me where I can find among my London roughs that strict sense of honour and that indis-

criminate hospitality which is so pleasing a characteristic of the Bedwin. I can only answer that I cannot find them, for the simple reason that the London rough has no necessity for them. When he wants to travel he simply takes a third-class ticket (unless he can by any means avoid that formality) and steps into a train. Arrived at his destination, if he is hungry he either steals his dinner, or, if unable to do so, buys it at the nearest pie-shop or public-house. When the Bedwin, on the contrary, has to make a journey (a very frequent occurrence) he has to ride for days across a desert in which not one drop of water or one mouthful of food is to be found. As the inhabitants of the country are all wanderers, it is impossible for him to tell exactly where the tents of his friends will be, and unless he can obtain food and water and shelter from strangers, he will have to die of thirst and cold and hunger in the desert. To-day it is one of the Houiât travelling in the country of the Alawîn. The Alawîn do not like the Houiât, but some day they may want to travel across the

mountains to Suez, and they know that if they let this Houiât man starve, or if they fail to keep their itching fingers from his purse, his opportunity of repaying them will come in time; and so, as a mere matter of mutual convenience, a system of indiscriminate hospitality and a strict code of honour have sprung up, as they would necessarily have to spring up among any people similarly situated.

CHAPTER VIII.

Tawarah *versus* Alawin—A bad start—Quite an accident—Off at last—The first watershed—A bad day for the instruments—Taking it easy—El Ta'abah—Heavy walking—The Gulf of Galilee—Ain Ghudiân—Bad water—Interview with the aborigines—A pleasant ride—"Do you see Richard?"—Making pictures—A bad day for Mohammedans.

Among all the new faces and the excitements of Akabah I had almost forgotten my old friends, Sheikhs Ali and Aïd, and their gentle, orderly Tawarah. Having conducted me safely to Akabah, they handed me over to the tender mercies of Hammid Jad, who promptly gave them a hint that the sooner they cleared out of his territory the better it would be for them. Then they came to my tent and wished me good-bye and good luck, and received with many thanks the presents which I gave them, and quietly returned to

their homes among the valleys of Mount Sinai. So unobtrusive had these people been, that they had left but little impression on me, and until the morning of the final start up the valley I had hardly given them a thought. A glance round, however, as I came out of my tent on the morning of the 3rd, soon showed how greatly things had changed for the worse. With the Tawarah everything went like clockwork. Quiet old Sheikh Aïd gave an order, and it was obeyed at once, without murmur and without fuss; every man knew what he had to do and did it; and the camels, accustomed to being laden, knelt down quietly till their loads were packed, then got up and walked solemnly after their leader. Now everything was reversed. Najm was swearing at the sheikhs, and the sheikhs were swearing at Najm, and at each other, and at their men, and the men were swearing at the sheikhs and at each other. Knowing old camels, refusing to stir with their loads, had to be unladen, and some of the weight distributed elsewhere; raw young camels, refusing to be laden at

all, were keeping a circle of Bedwin at bay with their teeth. The men were all fighting to get the lightest load, and all declaring at the same moment that they had got the heaviest. Everybody was giving orders, and nobody was obeying them. Through it all the rain was coming down in torrents. Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, nine o'clock passed, and things seemed scarcely one whit further forward than they had been at sunrise. The walls of the tents were down, and their roofs hung dripping round the poles, it is true, and our boxes and rugs were getting rapidly wetter and wetter, that was the only difference. "I am getting sick of this," I said to Peacocke, "let us go off, and leave them to fight it out among themselves." "All right," he said, "if you are really going to start I will get out my sketching-board." So he walked towards our tent, and stooped down to take it from under a pile of rugs which lay to leeward of the pole and loose canvas. Just at that moment Hammid Jad happened to stroll towards the tent, and seemed to think that the time had arrived to let go the guys, and

down came the pole with its weight of wet canvas between Peacocke's shoulders. Peacocke, who up to this time had not been brought as much into personal contact with the sheikh as myself, had always maintained that at all events he was a very fine-looking old man, and was, I believe, rather inclined to think that I was unnecessarily prejudiced against him. This little incident, however, completely converted him to my views, and "I am certain that old brute let down the tent on purpose" was pretty certain to crop up in any conversation which we had on the many failings of Hammid Jad.

Four times I had seen my dromedary saddled, and four times the saddle had been taken off and another put on in its place; so as soon as the fifth saddle had been put on his back, I put myself upon the saddle and steadily refused to move, and my example was followed by Peacocke and Cash. Sheikh Salaam, who had gained some insight into our ways on the previous Saturday, was determined that we should not give him the slip to-day, and promptly told off a man to

stand by and hold our bridles. For some time they kept to their posts, but gradually, in the excitement of the general hubbub round them, they slackened their hold, and one by one dropped off to join one of the numerous cursing-matches which were going on. Choosing a moment when every one was engaged, I gave my dromedary a kick behind the shoulder, and started off at a good swinging trot, closely followed by Peacocke and Cash. As I had expected, no one followed for some time ; it was a certainty that when they found out that we had gone they would stop for a quarter of an hour to argue about whose fault it was.

Our beasts had been travelling all night, and were not very good ones at their best, so after half an hour's trot I pulled up to a walk, till presently I heard in my rear a faint cry of "Khawajah! khawajah, bishwaysh!" (gentleman, gentleman, slowly) and turning round saw an unfortunate Bedwin, utterly out of breath, struggling after us. I allowed him to catch us up, and he promptly rewarded me for my kindness by seizing my

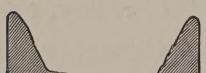
rein, and pulling my dromedary's head round towards Akabah. I promptly slipped off, and started northwards at a brisk walk. This manœuvre quite disconcerted him, as I suppose he had counted on my allowing myself to be led quietly home. Peacocke and Cash at once pushed on, and as he saw that it was quite impossible to stop all three of us, he wisely made up his mind that the best thing to do was to let me mount, while he hung on to my beast's breeching. We had not got far, however, when my dromedary, evidently in the conspiracy to stop me, dropped down on his knees, and, utterly regardless of my most powerful arguments, refused to budge one step further. Salman, as the Bedwin was called, regarded this as a special intervention of Providence in his favour, and loudly urged me to make a halt in this place. The sheikh, he said, was just behind, and he had orders not to let me go on without him. I however was determined to clear up the mystery of Mekreh Hadîd before sunset, and knowing as I did how late had been our start from Akabah, I thought that unless my

people knew that I was ahead, and must be caught up, they would be certain to make a very short march of it; and I was particularly anxious to make a good start, and pitch my camp ahead of that of the geologists.

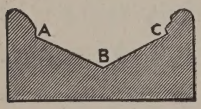
An hour's walk brought me to the furthest point which I had reached on Saturday, and in another quarter of an hour I was able to see for myself the downward slope which Peacocke had reported. Slopes are extremely difficult to judge in this valley, the refraction from the hot stones throwing up the distance, and making the spot on which one stands almost always appear to be in a hollow. This peculiarity made it almost impossible to say with any certainty what was the formation of the upper part of the valley. At my feet, to the northward, was an undoubted depression; and on the far side of this depression the ground appeared to rise considerably on the east, and slightly on the west side of the valley. Did it really rise? was the question which I was wholly unable to answer. How much it fell at my feet was

also an important question, and one which I was very impatient to solve; but before going ahead I felt that I ought to do a little more on the ground on which I stood.

As I explained in my general description of the valley, its sides in its lower part are marked by long, gentle slopes of *débris*, the centre of the valley being a nearly flat bed of mud; a section of it, therefore, say five miles from Akabah, would be something in this form:—



At Mekreh Hadîd the central mudflat has disappeared, and we have nothing but two stony slopes coming to a point in the centre of the valley thus:—



It is rather a remarkable point, to which Peacocke drew my attention, that the line of demarcation between these slopes is very clearly marked by the nature of the stones of which they are composed. The eastern slope from A to B, formed as it is of *débris* from the granite hills, being composed exclusively of granite fragments; while

the western slope, B C, is composed entirely of lumps of limestone. At a distance of about fifty yards to the north and south of B two streams take their rise, flowing respectively towards the sea and the marsh of El Ta'abah. To any one standing on the spot, it is perfectly evident that the barrier thus formed across the valley is continuous; but as I knew that my good friends at home would not have the advantage of so standing, and would probably prefer the evidence of an aneroid to that of my eyes, I sacrificed my afternoon, and about six months' wear of my boots, in trudging up these slopes, and proving that the impossible gully through them did not exist.

This day was rather a disastrous one for the instruments. On pulling my thermometer out of my pocket when I arrived at Mekreh Hadîd, I found that the brass plate which held the glass in its place had come off, through the splitting of the wood and consequent loosening of the screws, and that the tube had slipped out and got broken—thus the second of my three thermometers was *hors de combat*. The other sufferer was

the camera. I had been taking a photograph of the Wady el Methedi, and handed the camera over to Cash to pack up while I went for my walk up the slope. On returning I found that it had performed that mysterious feat to which costly inanimate objects are so prone. Cash said that it had "come to pieces in his hand."

My first care on getting to camp was to find some safe means of carrying my precious and now unique thermometer. I was just setting to work to make a stiff leather case for it, when Cash remembered a certain case in which Yosîf kept his packing-needles. This was found, with the help of a little cotton wool, to answer admirably, and was accordingly annexed. As I forgot to mention the fact to its owner, he was rather surprised next morning to see it hanging, apparently as an ornament, round Cash's neck. The camera was a rather more difficult matter; but with the help of some glue, the seat of a discarded pair of Peacocke's trousers, and some brass screws which I took out of the lid of the artificial-horizon case, I managed to make a serviceable, if not very neat, job of it.

If I had regretted the loss of the Tawarah when we left Akabah, the change for the worse was made doubly apparent now. By the time the sun had risen Sheikh Aïd and his men had been astir for an hour or more, and if we were not actually under way, we were never far off it. I myself was rather late this morning, and the sky was well aglow before I left my tent. Not a movement was to be seen; the Bedwin were quietly smoking round the camp-fires, and the camels scattered over the valley. On inquiring what it all meant, I was calmly told that it was too cold to move at present, and that the Alawîn were not in the habit of leaving their camp-fires till the sun warmed the air a little. As my dromedary was somewhere over on the other side of the valley, there was nothing for it but walking. At the end of my first halt Sheikh Salaam caught me up, and stuck to me all the forenoon, keeping up a perpetual fire of "slowly, slowly," and suggesting every ten minutes that it was time to halt for lunch. The direct road up the valley lay on the west side, and the fact that I insisted on following the east side, which was

the lowest, appeared to annoy him extremely. However he stuck to me like a man till we came to the edge of the marsh El Ta'abah. Here I jumped off my dromedary, and stepped off on foot across the mud in a north-easterly direction, leaving him standing on the brink, unable to follow me on his dromedary, and not liking to leave the beasts to their fate. I left him evidently lost in speculation as to what atrocity I should commit next, and whether he would ever see me again, and completely of one mind with his countryman who exclaimed, "Truly there are many devils, but the greatest of all devils is a Frank in a round hat." [1]

This marsh was a great disappointment to me; looking at it from Mekreh Hadîd, the fall had seemed a very considerable one, and I had even entertained hopes that I might find it below the sea-level.[2] My aneroids,

[1] Tancred.

[2] A moment's thought would have shown me the impossibility of this, as the water flowing into the basin, having no outlet, would necessarily leave a deep deposit of mud here.

however, only showed a fall of 113 feet, and as there seemed to be a deep water-course on the extreme east edge of it, I pushed on towards it in the hopes of finding a lower channel. It was not a pleasant walk; the sun was intensely hot, and after the recent rain the mud was very deep. The surface had just dried and was covered with a thin incrustation of salt, through which, at each step, one broke and sank into the slush below. There was not a dry spot anywhere to sit down on, and if one stood still one only sank deeper and deeper into the mud. In the middle of this lively place I spread out my coat to receive the aneroids, and prepared myself to pass a very miserable hour, waiting for Cash. Now my experience through life has been that when one has made up one's mind to be bored, in nine cases out of ten one enjoys oneself immensely; and whenever one thinks that one is going to spend a particularly pleasant evening, the chances are greatly in favour of one's wishing oneself safely home in bed before it is half over. What I had ex-

perienced elsewhere I experienced again in the salt-marsh of El Ta'abah. With my eyes fixed on the ravine in the north-east corner, I had trudged wearily along, looking neither to the right nor left; and it was not until I had deposited my aneroids that I turned round and beheld as lovely a scene as it has ever been my good fortune to come across. About a quarter of a mile to the southward the edge of a placid lake broke the dreary line of the marsh; reflected on its surface were the bold granite rocks of the eastern range, and the sandstone cliffs near the mouth of the Wady el Amrah; in the distance was the faint outline of Mekreh Hadîd. Gradually the waters of the lake began to rise, and, Mekreh Hadîd sinking beneath their surface, a narrow strait, dancing and glittering in the sunshine, stretched far towards the Indian Ocean; reflected on its surface were still the rocks of El Methedi and El Amrah; beyond them a long vista of irregular cliffs, ending in the east with the palm-groves of Akabah, and on the west with the rocky islet on which stands the ruined castle of Kuryeh. I

had been taken back ten, twenty, fifty, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years; and before me lay a scene on which perhaps no human eye had ever before rested—the Gulf of Galilee as it was before Mekreh Hadîd was formed. "What on earth is the meaning of all this rubbish?" the matter-of-fact reader will exclaim. "Was the fellow mad, or drunk, or dreaming?" I was neither the one nor the other, but simply witnessing that perfectly natural phenomenon, the mirage. There is a reverse to every medal, and the refraction which had called up this strange and beautiful revival became an abominable nuisance when the arrival of Cash recalled me to the business of the day. What was water and what was land? was there any water at all? and if it was all land, which was the highest and which the lowest part of it? were questions which in this dancing, delusive atmosphere it was utterly impossible to answer until one had trudged for many a weary mile over the soft mud. When I got to camp, I found that Peacocke had also been led to believe that a channel

might be found on the east of the valley, and had been doing a little exploration in the marsh, the result being, as he said, that before he was half through it he had begun to wonder why he had ever been born.

Our camp was at Ain Ghudiân, as the half-dozen wells at the head of this marsh are called, but "Ain" I should imagine to be a misnomer, there being no spring, and the wells simply collecting the water from the soft, saturated ground. I may mention that of all the bad salt water of the Arabah that from these wells is the worst and most salt, while that from Ain Ghurundel, although very muddy, is the sweetest and best. It is a pretty enough place all the same, situated at the mouth of a narrow wady whose winter torrent affords sufficient moisture to sustain a good number of graceful *syâl* bushes.

A few hundred yards above the wells the limestone appears, for the first time on a level with the surface of the valley, in a low bluff called Etref Eziân.

We were now at the foot of the low ridge which I had seen from Mekreh Hadîd, but

from our present position it was impossible to see which was the lowest part of it, so before starting off in the morning I climbed the limestone bluff which I have mentioned, and got a pretty good view of the ground. At my feet, along the western edge of the valley, ran a water-course; and I could see that the large one which I had noticed emptying itself into the north-eastern corner of the marsh continued for some distance up that side. Between the two water-courses lay a long ridge of tumbled sand-hills. As the Bedwin were still enjoying themselves round their camp-fires, and the camels still browsing among the *syâl* bushes, I started off on foot in a north-easterly direction across these sand-hills, giving Cash a point to march on when his hour was up. But sand-hills are puzzling things to find one's way in, and Cash managed to lose his point. After waiting patiently for a good hour after the appointed time, I mounted one of the highest dunes, and began to whistle and wave my handkerchief, but not a sign of Cash was to be seen. I was still waving and whistling, without any

apparent result, when looking round I was surprised to see two Bedwin squatting about fifty yards off and watching my movements with great interest. Where on earth they had sprung from I have not the faintest idea; their camp could not be near, for there was nothing for them or their camels to live on in this waste of sand. "Come here," I shouted, as I did not want to come off my mound. Upon this they promptly got up and walked away, and, as I wanted to see what a Bedwin who presumably had not been rubbed up against Christians was like, I deserted my post and gave chase, upon which they stopped again. "Peace be with you," I said as I neared them. Their countenances, which had been rather serious, at once changed, and holding their right hands before their eyes, that the glory of my presence might not dazzle them, they repeated my salutation.[3] "Will you have a cigarette?" I asked after a few minutes, offering my

[3] I did not notice that the Bedwin employed the regular formula, "Peace be with you," "And with you peace," which is *de rigueur* in the West.

box at the same time. Until I had actually handed it to them I had forgotten that it was a silver one, and therefore waited now with some curiosity to see what they would do with it. Hammid Jad, I knew, never took less than a handful out of a cardboard box, and according to all traditions these two wild fellows, finding me alone and unarmed in the middle of this desert, ought at least to have annexed the whole box. They did not do anything of the sort, however, but taking one cigarette apiece, they thanked me, politely handed me back the box, and saluted, saluting and thanking me again when I gave them a light. Then I sat down, and as they remained standing, I asked them to follow my example, which they did and after smoking for a few minutes, got up, wished me good-bye, saluted again, and disappeared among the sand-hills. Now among the men of my own party I never, with one or two exceptions, received the slightest civility at first, and I appeared to be looked upon as a sort of walking money-bag or perambulating tobacco-pouch, which, having done its duty of

supplying their wants, need not be given another thought till it was required again. I have got perhaps a rather bad habit of jumping at conclusions, and the conclusion which I arrived at from comparing these wild mountaineers with their rather more civilized brethren was that the latter had simply been spoiled by the Europeans with whom they had come in contact.

As soon as my friends had gone, I mounted my sand-heap again, and soon saw Cash, very hot and out of breath, making the best of his way towards me, and soon after Sheikh Salaam appeared with my dromedary and followed by Najm, who always thought it necessary to search me out and try to stuff down my throat the various delicacies without which he seemed to think it impossible that an Englishman could live. However, I had wasted too much time already, so emptying the water-bottle and taking a handful of dates I jumped on my dromedary and started off. I had not gone 100 yards when my dromedary, apparently thinking, with his master the sheikh, that the middle of the day should be

devoted to rest, dropped down. I had learnt too much of the ways of these intelligent beasts to waste my time and muscles in any attempt to make him change his mind, so with a parting blessing started off to walk again. Even Sheikh Salaam must have been a little ashamed of this performance of the miserable animal which his rascally old uncle had palmed off upon me as a *hajeen*, or riding-camel, for following me on his own beast he offered to change—an offer which I gladly accepted, and enjoyed a very pleasant ride for once, on a really good animal. A little light-coloured, woolly thing was this dromedary of Sheikh Salaam; not very well bred I should fancy, and perhaps not a very good stayer, but very fast for a short distance. Often I saw the sheikh galloping alongside of a half-bred greyhound, in pursuit of gazelles or hares, and keeping up with him easily too; and Rishar, as the dog was called, had no mean turn of speed either, and as often as not secured a hare for his master's dinner. "Why do they call him Rishar?" I asked Najm one day. "Some Frenchmen come this way

one time, and give this people that dog,'' replied the old man, who would have sooner died than admit his ignorance on any subject whatever. Rishar, as a matter of fact, is a generic name applied by the Bedwin to anything which is fast; I believe it means literally "the flyer." Najm's answer, which was made under the misapprehension that the dog's name was Richard, reminds me of the interesting fact that the memory of our lion-hearted king still lingers and is respected in this country. "Teshoof Rikard?" (do you see Richard) says the Bedwin if his beast shies; and "I will call Rikard" is applied by Syrian mothers to their squalling offspring, with an effect as good, I am told, as that produced by a similar invocation of Cromwell on the lachrymose babies of Ireland.

Mounted on Sheikh Salaam's good little dromedary, I had a very peaceful afternoon. Salman was, it is true, sent in pursuit, but he rarely managed to get to the forward station before Cash, on whose arrival I started off again. Although I was well mounted, Cash was not, indeed he soon gave up his dromedary

in disgust, and took to his feet, and thus our rate of progress was not a bit faster than usual. I had covered a good deal of ground in the course of the day, and the delay in the morning threw us rather back, and the consequence was that at sunset I found myself nearly an hour's march from camp, and with still an hour to wait for Cash. Knowing that if Sheikh Salaam saw me he would think it necessary to offer me his protection (?), I hid myself in the bed of a dry water-course, and settled down for an hour's quiet thought. I had not been there half an hour, however, before I heard a whistle. Now this was the signal by which Cash and I indicated our whereabouts to one another. I thought that he had been wonderfully quick, but never doubting that it was he, at once answered it, and in two minutes appeared, not Cash, but Sheikh Salaam, delighted at his sharpness in finding me, and beaming with smiles. Our camp was a few miles further up the valley, and that of the opposition party near my station, and it turned out that Peacocke, thinking that in the darkness I might make a

mistake, and walk into the jaws of the enemy, had lent Salaam his whistle, and sent him in search of me. Salaam's smile soon vanished when I said that I had not the slightest intention of moving at present, and his face grew very long indeed when Cash appeared, and I told him that he would have to wait there another hour. Poor Salaam was utterly at a loss to understand our manœuvres. Never, he confided to Najm, in his life had he seen such gentlemen as we were. Off before sunrise, never back till long after dark, rushing about all over the valley in different directions, galloping the dromedaries to death, and when they could go no more jumping off and running on ourselves on foot—what in the name of the prophet did it all mean? We were making pictures, said Najm, that was all. Well, answered Salaam, he had once travelled to Hebron with an English gentleman who made pictures, and he was not at all like us, he was a nice quiet gentleman, and rode along the track and did what he was told. Ah! very likely, said Najm; but the pictures which we were making were of a very superior quality.

I did not very much care what Sheikh Salaam thought, as I knew very well that he was not man enough to stop me. Old Hammid Jad, I believe, instigated by the dragoman of the other party,[4] had asked me some very pointed questions about my connection with the canal, but I had managed to put him off the scent, and I knew very well that he would not hear any more of my movements now till I was safely back at Akabah and the survey over. If the canal is ever made it will, of course, ruin him, and the old gentleman was quite sharp enough to appreciate this fact.

"It will be a very bad day for Mohammedans," he said, "if this canal is made. How will the pilgrims get to Mecca, if their route is occupied by Christians?"

This being interpreted into plain Arabic, I suppose, meant, "How shall I be able to extort money from them when these cursed Christian steamers will carry them at five francs a head."

[4] I do not wish it to be supposed for a moment that I insinuate that Professor Hull or Major Kitchener had anything to do with this.

CHAPTER IX.

In doubt—At fault—"I've seen it with my own eyes"—Deceptive ground—Rishi—Wady Ghurundel—The watershed—Wady Houar—Benighted—Aïd's gun—Out in the cold—A bivouac—Bedwin hospitality—Beans without bacon—Revolvers—Uses of imagination.

I HAD hoped that the previous day's work would solve the question of the ridge which I had seen from Mekreh Hadîd, but when we got up on the morning of the 6th, it still looked as uncompromising as ever from our camp at the mouth of Wady Musaib. Najm and Sheikh Salaam had both assured me most positively that the waters flowing from the northern slope of Mekreh Hadîd ran towards the Dead Sea, and found no further hindrance in their course. This information I, of course, now knew to be false, but I hardly knew how much to believe of

a similar assurance which they now gave me that the ridge before me was positively the watershed. We were all convinced that the ground fell again after a few miles, and the only point on which I had any doubts was whether there was any channel to be found to the eastward; so again crossing the sand-hills I started off towards the far side of the valley. The aneroids showed a decided rise on that side, but I had also the satisfaction of seeing the ground falling away, and a water-course running to the northward at my feet, and at the bottom of the slope, a large marshy tract somewhat similar to El Ta'abah. Here, then, was undoubtedly a watershed at a distance of thirty miles from Akabah, and as the information of the Arabs had proved to be correct in respect to this, their assertion that there was no further barrier might also prove to be true. The only thing to be settled now was which was the lowest part of this barrier, and as the ground fell distinctly to the west, I started off again in this direction, till I came to a dry water-course, towards which the ground

fell both from the east and west. Here, then, was the saddle, and I proceeded to follow up the water-courses and the line of *rims* bushes which marked it till they died away. Fifty yards further on they commenced again. Just as at Mekreh Hadîd, the two streams flowing in opposite directions took their rise in a similar saddle within a stone's throw of each other. Halfway between these two stream-heads was evidently the lowest point of the watershed. I must mention that no rain had fallen since the 3rd, and the water-courses were perfectly dry.

To my right front, that is to say, about three miles ahead in a north-easterly direction, was the mouth of the large Wady Ghurundel, evidently flowing to the northward; a few miles further on the valley suddenly narrowed, and some twelve or fifteen miles to the northward a high ridge of ground stretched across it. This rather startled me at first, but I was assured so positively that this was only a branch of the valley, and that the true Arabah ran at a lower level to the west, that I took heart,

and for once the information of the Bedwin proved to be partly true.

Near the mouth of the Wady Ghurundel there appeared to be a very considerable depression, and towards this I accordingly turned my steps. The aneroids at the lowest point of the ridge had shown a height of 626 feet; imagine my surprise, then, on arriving at this depression, as I thought it, to find that according to them I had risen 33 feet. The aneroids had been working well up to this point, and I racked my brains in vain to think how they could suddenly have got out of order. Not only did a comparison of their readings show a rise, but each read independently gave the same result. There was one point on which I felt perfectly certain, and that was that from unexplained causes they had gone wrong. Yet, as will be seen later on, the levelling afterwards proved that the aneroids had been perfectly right, and our eyes, in which we had such implicit confidence, completely wrong. Peacocke confessed to me afterwards that, when standing on the spot which I had marked as

the watershed, a little eye-level which he carried had shown that the ground rose to the northward, and he had at once put the instrument away, as out of adjustment.

This is a most peculiar and deceptive bit of ground. A long *talus* runs out from the mouth of the Wady Aheimeh from which the waters flow to the north and south, and its eastern end is more than 100 feet above that part of the Arabah immediately to the north of it. This *talus* runs almost completely across the valley, and its western end is hidden from the south by a spur running out from the mouth of the Wady Byân, and from the north by a similar one at the mouth of the Wady Thlah, and the end of the slope is thus never seen unless one is actually standing on it, and even then the eye is deceived by seeing the ground fall on every side to the north and south, and by the fact of the accidental break in the stream and bushes at this point.

Our camp was pitched at the mouth of the Wady Thlah, on the western side of the marsh which I have mentioned. From this

point we were able to confirm the truth of Salaam's statement that the valley branched off to the west,[1] and that the saddle over which it passed was far lower than that on the east.

The range of hills, Rishi, as they are called, which divide these two branches, is a very peculiar one; it consists of two very narrow ridges of a remarkably brittle and fossiliferous limestone, joined by a similar ridge running across the centre, the whole forming a somewhat elongated H; the southern part being a deep sandy bay or creek, sheltered from view from most points, and hardly noticeable till one is actually in it. The water from the central ridge draining into this bay loses itself in the swamp to the south. The northern or upper part of the H drains on the contrary towards the central ridge, and makes its escape through a narrow gorge on the west side, and then doubling back on itself flows into the Lehyana on its way to the Dead Sea.

[1] As I have pointed out in Chapter VI., this western branch is not the true, or, at all events, not the original, valley, but only a saddle in the limestone promontory.

On no point in connection with this valley has there been greater difference of opinion than on the course and destination of the Wady Ghurundel, nor is the reason of this far to seek. Looking at the valley itself from any point of view, one would unhesitatingly say that it flowed towards the north, emerging as it does from a deep ravine running nearly south-east and north-west. Standing at the foot of Rishi, on the other hand, and seeing the barriers which apparently run across the valley both to the north and south, one would at once conclude that the waters had no escape. While any one standing at the mouth of the Wady Byân after a heavy thunderstorm, and seeing the waters rushing past him towards El Ta'abah, would take it for granted that the waters of the Ghurundel escaped to the south. The configuration of the ground points, I think, without doubt, to the conclusion that in former ages the Ghurundel flowed towards the north, but the silting up which has taken place has partly changed its course, and in ordinary seasons its waters, creeping over the nearly level mudflat,

become absorbed or evaporated before they reach the narrow channel near Wady el Byân. It is only after heavy storms that the mudflat overflows and its surplus waters escape towards the south.

On the following morning (December 7th) I started off towards the limestone saddle, and reached the top of the ridge at eight o'clock. The primary object of my journey was accomplished, and one day under a month from the time of my leaving England I stood on the much-talked-about water-shed, having encountered no opposition worth speaking of, never having so much as heard the name of a Turk mentioned.

My aneroids gave a height of 761 feet above the sea-level, which the after-levelling proved to be 119 feet in excess of the truth,[2] and a meridian observation of the sun gave a latitude of 30° 11′ 20″ N., that is to say, 39′ 42″ north of Akabah.[3]

I stood on a nearly level bed of silt

[2] I had slightly overshot the lowest point of the ridge, which the level proved to be a few hundred yards further to the south and 673 feet above the sea-level.

[3] See page 246.

extending about 100 yards to the east and west, and about three quarters of a mile to the north and south; at either end of this bed small water-courses took their rise, flowing respectively towards El Ta'abah and the Wady Lehyana. On the west a gradual slope of clay covered with small fragments of limestone, rose for a couple of miles, and on the east the ground, of a similar nature, cut up by numerous small water-courses, gradually ascended in a series of undulations towards the limestone ridge of Rishi. On the north-west was the Wady Lehyana flowing between the chalk and limestone ranges, and ascending in the south-westerly direction to the Tih, while towards the south it followed the extreme western border of the Arabah. Straight to the south lay the broad expanse of the Arabah itself, bounded on the east by a bold granite range, above which towered the double top of Jabal Haroum (Mount Hor), and on the west by the low chalk-hills which here formed the boundary of the Tih plateau. The bed of the Arabah sloped from the

eastern range towards the Lehyana, and towards this wady the water-courses from all parts appeared to tend.

Having taken my meridian altitude, and carried my aneroid a sufficient distance up the western slope to prove the rise of the ground, I set off towards the Rishi ridge, telling Najm where I was going, and giving orders that the camp should be pitched two hours' march from our last night's halting-place. As I did not think it necessary to carry on the step-system any longer for my aneroid observations, I took Cash with me. Half an hour's walk brought me into the most western portion of the double range of Rishi. Here I noticed that the strata had the same dip as those in the main range, a fact which pointed to the conclusion that this promontory had not been affected by the catastrophe which formed the Arabah. The rock of which this range is formed is a crystalline and very brittle limestone, remarkably rich in fossils, and which, I judge, from its nature must have undergone the action of heat. Although I had no hammer with me,

I had no difficulty in detaching any specimens that I required from the parent rock. Crossing the western range I found myself in the central valley of Rishi, which in its turn led me on to a broad stony plateau overlooking that eastern branch of the Arabah which I hold to be the original channel. Into this I descended, and found it at this point to be 771 feet above the sea-level by my aneroid.[4] Before me lay the great gravel wall piled up by the Wady Houar. I cannot imagine any one standing on this slope arriving at any other conclusion than that it was formed by the action of water; the large water-worn boulders with which it is strewn all point to this conclusion, and a deep ravine formed by a torrent at its south-eastern extremity gives a good section, and shows that at all events no rock[5] enters into its composition. The depth and size of this cutting led me to

[4] I calculate that this is ninety feet in excess of the truth.

[5] I use this word in its ordinary and not in its geological sense.

imagine for a time that it might prove to be a channel through the ridge, and I spent some time in following it up, but found that it soon lost itself in the hills.

The waters of the Wady Houar, like those of all the other water-courses which open into the Arabah, diverge, on leaving the parent valley, to the north and south. On following a central line between these diverging streams, I found that the lowest part of the watershed of this ridge was on its extreme western edge, immediately under the wall of Rishi, and that its height was 930 feet above the sea-level.

While I had been wandering about this ridge, I had frequently heard the familiar cry of "Khawajah," followed by entreaties to me to stop, and soon after I had set up my boiling-point apparatus on the lowest point of the water-parting I was joined by my young friend the objectionable boy, and a youth called Aïd, leading our dromedaries. The sun, they said, was setting, and our camp was a long way off. Both these statements were for a wonder perfectly true. The

sun had long since sunk behind Rishi, and our camp was at least ten miles off. However, I wanted to get a boiling-point reading at this place, and did not want to be forced to revisit it, if I could avoid it. The consequence was that by the time we had got to the top of Rishi again on our homeward journey it was dark.

"Which way?" inquired Aïd.

"Well, I suppose you know where the camp is," I replied, and was rather surprised to hear that he did not; however, as I knew pretty well where two hours' march from Wady Thlah ought to have placed it, I said, "All right, I will show you the way," and guided by Fomalhaut, which I knew was at that time just past the meridian, I steered a little west of south. It had been an intensely hot day, but as the sun set a bitterly cold north-east wind sprang up. "Let us hurry on a bit," I said to Cash, and we broke into a trot, not for long, however; Cash's beast had always had a rooted objection to any other pace than a walk, and soon performed the only, but always

successful manœuvre of his tribe, and lay down, and as long as Cash sat on his back, there he stayed and seemed likely to stay, so until he chose to recover his temper, Cash had to walk, a proceeding which he strongly objected to, having developed rather a bad sore heel during the day's march. It was too cold to ride at a foot-pace, so I soon got off and accompanied him. After about two hours' marching, Aïd began to show symptoms of uneasiness, and made constant inquiries as to the whereabouts of the camp; I also was beginning to think that we ought to see the lights, so when he suggested that he should fire his gun, I made no objection.

I had never seen a Bedwin fire a gun before, and the recollection of what I saw on this occasion will, I hope, inspire me with great confidence should it ever be my fortune to be engaged in mortal combat with these people. First of all the gun had to be undressed, and a good deal of fumbling went on in the dark before all the different strings and straps which fastened on its jacket could be undone. Then came more wrapping

round the lock, then the plug of rag had to be fished out of the muzzle, and Aïd's fingers were extremely cold and numb. All was now ready for a start, and taking the little case of power out of his belt, Aïd carefully poured a charge into the palm of his hand, and all would have gone smoothly had not the camel which he was leading chosen that moment to make a snatch at a *rims* bush. The powder fell on the sand, and the operation was begun over again, and carried out this time with great success; but there was still the pan to be filled, and when this was done the powder had to be persuaded to ignite, and this I discovered to be the great difficulty in firing a gun. Aïd raised the gun to his shoulder, leant well back, looked round to make sure that we were all giving our attention to the wonderful trick which he was going to perform, shut his eyes, and pulled the trigger; down came the hammer with a snap, the flint struck the steel, and nothing further happened.

But few of us can always command success, and Aïd knew that it was only to be

arrived at by patience and perseverance, so, not in the least put out by the failure of his experiment, he cocked the gun again, brought it to his shoulder, shut his eyes, and again pulled the trigger. This time he was rewarded by having his eyebrows scorched by the ignition of the powder in the pan. That in the barrel, it is true, had not caught fire, but that was perhaps rather too much to expect all at once, and Aïd seemed confident that the explosion of the charge would take place in due time, and he was right. Breathlessly we awaited the result of his dangerous experiment, and as he pulled the trigger for the eleventh time, he was rewarded by seeing a column of flame issue from the muzzle, and hearing a noise which, if not quite as loud as that produced by the bursting of a paper bag, was certainly louder than any we could have made by clapping our hands; and I think therefore that, take it all in all, the experiment may be said to have been a success. I am afraid that in these pages I have not been able to say very much in favour of the Bedwin character, but I hope

that the foregoing account will at all events point to the conclusion that he is not wanting in patience; but I suppose a people who can stand the camel can stand anything.

As the report of Aïd's gun did not have the desired effect of attracting anybody's attention, he had to content himself with making such noises as could be produced by a very powerful pair of lungs. As this book may fall into the hands of some of the more youthful members of the community, I will not run the risk of drawing upon my head the anathemas of the whole adult population, by giving any hint as to the nature or manner of production of the strange sounds which issued from Aïd's throat, but I may mention that every now and then, between the more diabolical of his yells, he would give vent to an "ahoy" exactly similar to that used by English sailors.

After a three-hours' march we found ourselves on some very broken ground, with a tendency to rise towards the west. The sky had clouded over, and the night was very dark. From what I had seen of the valley

from Rishi, I felt sure that the bed of the Arabah was a gradual gravel descent to its western edge, and the rough ground under my feet therefore indicated that we must have crossed the valley and arrived at the foot of the low chalk range on the west. There was not a sign of the camp to be seen, and not a sound to be heard. The question was: was the camp pitched further to the south or to the north? Had we under or over-shot it? As it was quite impossible to answer this, I thought that the best thing to do was to make ourselves as comfortable as we could and wait where we were. Knowing how concerned Sheikh Salaam always seemed to be for my safety, and the fearful state of excitement into which Najm got whenever I was out after dark, I had little doubt that men would be scouring the valley for me right and left, and thought that they would have a much better chance of finding me if I stayed in one place than if I wandered about, perhaps in the wrong direction. In arriving at this conclusion, however, I had forgotten to take into consideration the important fact that there was

one person in whose safety Sheikh Salaam took even a deeper interest than he did in mine, and that person was himself.

There was plenty of wood about, and we soon had a good fire, and with the saddle-bags for pillows made ourselves very comfortable as far as our outsides were concerned. Internally I felt the strongest possible evidence that it was dinner-time. I had had a very light and hasty lunch while I was taking the sun at noon, and had emptied the water-bottle before leaving the eastern watershed. "Is there food in the saddle-bags?" I asked of Aïd as he took them off the dromedaries. "Makl mafeesh, wa moyeh mafeesh" (there is no food and no water), he mournfully replied; so I lit a cigarette, and curling myself up by the fire was soon asleep. After about an hour I woke, feeling very cold between my shoulders, which were turned away from the fire, and abominably hungry. Looking up, I saw Aïd and the boy hard at work eating. "I thought you said there was no food," I exclaimed. "There was nothing but these," said Aïd, holding out a handful of horse-beans, "and

they were what the camels fed on and were *baitâl*" (good for nothing). Feeling quite certain that they were good enough for me, I pulled a handful out of the saddle-bag and at once set to work on them.

Great stress has been laid by different writers on the hospitality of the Bedwin, and no doubt, as I have already said, for the sake of common convenience it does exist among themselves. The present occasion was one, I should have imagined, on which any grain of hospitality in any man's nature would have been likely to come to the front. Here were we four people, all cold, hungry, and thirsty, and, as I afterwards heard, the two Bedwin in constant dread of being attacked and murdered, and very thankful for the protection which an imaginary revolver, which was supposed to be concealed under my coat, afforded. In the saddle-bags were beans enough to last us a week or more, but these beans happened to be the private property of the Bedwin, and these hospitable people had waited until they saw that I was safely asleep before exposing their store, and when I dis-

covered their secret and took advantage of it, promptly demanded payment for the dinner which they were reluctantly providing me with. This attempted extortion was the more barefaced as Aïd was at that moment calmly puffing one of the half-dozen cigarettes which remained to me. "All right," I said, "I will pay you for the beans when you have paid me for that cigarette." Utterly unabashed, Aïd, finding his demands for money disregarded, broke at once into a prolonged whine for "backsheesh," and ran through a list of things which he required. As I was going to ride in the morning while he would have to walk, he suggested, first, that I should take off my boots and hand them over to him; my coat he also thought would look well on his person, and the rug I always had folded on my saddle would, he naively remarked, be very useful to him on cold nights. He finished by demanding my revolver. I had not got a revolver, but I did not tell him so, and as my patience was beginning to wear out, I merely growled "Oskoot" (silence), and turned over to sleep.

I hope that it will not be imagined that it was from any *bravado* that I neglected to carry a revolver. I did so merely because I thought that I was safer without one. The Bedwin are by this time pretty well accustomed to this weapon, and have a very fair idea of its value, which in my humble opinion is *nil*. Of all dangers there is none so terrifying as that which is unknown. If a man walks about with a revolver, his exact fighting value can be appraised by any one who sees him. Any one can see that he can fire six shots in succession, and when he has fired his shots everybody knows that he can be knocked on the head before he has time to reload. In a country where all the world goes about armed to the teeth, the inhabitants can hardly conceive that any one should walk about utterly defenceless, and, seeing a man in the habit of running all over the country alone and with no apparent means of defence, jump at the conclusion that he must have some exceptionally terrible instrument of destruction concealed about him.

My dinner of beans having removed the

unpleasant sensation in my interior, I rolled myself up once more and was soon fast asleep. I was roused in the morning by Aïd, who pointed out that the sun was rising and that it was time to be off.

CHAPTER X.

"Stupid people"—The Ma'azy—A breach of etiquette—Boiling-points—A queer instrument—Misappropriation—Wady Jerafeh—A devotee—Najm's adventure—My double—A forlorn hope—Why Mohammoud left his gun—The end of the journey—Levelling and aneroids—A rehearsal—The sheikh and his men.

As there was no sign of the camp in sight, Cash went up a neighbouring hill to look out and presently signaled to us that it was to the south, that is to say, we had overshot it, or rather Sheikh Salaam had not marched as far as he had been told to do.

As I had expected, every one was in a great state of excitement about me. I found the camp nearly deserted, but luckily Petrōs, not sharing in the general excitement, had not volunteered to join the search expedition, and was able to cook me some breakfast. Yosîf

was also at home, and entertained me as I discussed my meal, with a graphic account of how he, accompanied only by the dog Rishar, had patrolled the valley in search of me throughout the weary night.

"Just what I expected," said Peacocke, when he returned; "I was certain that you would turn up as soon as I went out to look for you." Poor old Najm, he said, had been in a fearful state of excitement all night, and had whiled away the hours of darkness by blood-curdling stories of travellers who had been lost in this district and never heard of again, and to emphasize his narrative pointed out that not one of the parties of Bedwin, which had been sent out hours ago to look for me, had returned. Saying this he left the tent to inquire if anything had been seen or heard of the missing men. Presently he returned in a high state of indignation. "This people stupid, sar, like the animals!" he exclaimed. Now this was very strong language for Najm, who, Peacocke always declared, must have received his English education at a seminary for young ladies. Inquiry proved that the

stupidity of which the Bedwin had been guilty consisted in their marching off bravely on the search past the tents, and returning quietly in a few minutes' time from an opposite direction, and at once lying down by their fires and going to sleep, in which state Najm had found them. The fact was we were a little out of the Alawîn territory, and the whole party were in mortal dread of the Ma'azy who inhabited this district. It was a reluctance to remain longer in their territory than he could help, which had made Salaam halt short of the spot I had indicated, and it had also caused him to pitch the camp in a hollow in which it was impossible to see it from any distance. When, after waiting for an hour or two, Peacocke found that I did not turn up, he collected some wood, and proceeded to light a fire on the bank above the camp. "What are you doing!" whined Salaam, beside himself with terror; "if there are any of the Ma'azy about, they will see us now, and we may all be murdered."

The Ma'azy is a small tribe occupying the northern portion of the Arabah, and living

in alliance with the more powerful tribes of Touitât and Beni Hammidi. It is their connection with the latter which causes them to be so much feared by the Alawîn. I do not know how the quarrel originated, but it seems that some years ago Hammid im Jelli, sheikh of the Beni Hammidi, killed Hammid Jad's brother, and announced at the same time his intention of clearing off the whole of his crew. According to all the laws of Arabian etiquette it was now Hammid Jad's duty to kill Hammid im Jelli, but thinking discretion the better part of valour, he has on the contrary always kept carefully out of his way. Judging by the conduct of his followers on this and a subsequent occasion, his course of action appears to have met with the cordial approval of his tribe.

After their severe exertions during the night, Sheikh Salaam declared that his men must have a day's rest, and as no amount of persuasion on my part would make him change his mind, I had to accept his decision. This was a nuisance in one way, as I was anxious to get down to the sea-level as quickly as

possible, but, on the other hand, it gave me an opportunity of going over the watershed again, and giving it a more careful examination than I had been able to do on the previous day. I made no new discovery, however, beyond the fact that a boiling-point thermometer may be made to give two totally different readings at the same place and under precisely similar atmospheric conditions. Further experience with this useful little instrument has taught me that in this district it may be made to prove almost anything, as far as levels are concerned. The water, strongly impregnated with salt as it is, probably boils at a fraction of a degree higher than pure water in any case. If the boiling is at all prolonged, evaporation of course rapidly makes the solution more and more saturated, with the result of a higher and higher boiling-point. My attention was first directed to this by my boiling-point thermometer proving me to be some feet below the sea-level in a place where the aneroids showed that I was nearly 300 feet above it. Prolonged boiling always seemed to

raise the mercury column in three distinct steps. Say the true boiling-point was 210°, the mercury would run quietly up to that and remain there, say forty seconds, then it would slowly rise to 210·4° and there stick for a time, and then after a slow rise, lasting perhaps a minute, make a stand at 210·7°. At first, not being on the look-out for these sources of errors, I naturally assumed that the highest reading was the true one.

Of all the many things which puzzled the Bedwin about me, there was nothing which excited their curiosity so much as this boiling-point apparatus. The sextant they connected in some vague way with the sun, and the artificial horizon they knew at once contained *zîbák* (mercury), and had some notion that it was used in some way or other for foretelling the weather. The aneroids were simply watches, but nobody could say what this machine was for. First of all I lit a lamp and poured some water into a cup—perhaps I was going to make coffee, but I put no coffee in, but only a long straight piece of glass. Then I lay down on my stomach and watched it

intently. Evidently something very extraordinary would happen by-and-by, and everybody would crowd round to see the result of the experiment. One, two, three, four, five minutes of intense expectation, and I took out the tube, wiped it, blew out the lamp, and packed the whole thing up again, and the crowd dispersed, looking as sulky as an English audience who have paid a shilling a head to see a girl break her neck, and have discovered when it is too late that there is a net under the trapeze.

The next day was an easy one for all hands, a short march for the camels, and a straight run down the course of the Wady Lehyana for us. There was no uncertainty here as to which was the lowest level, and consequently none of that zigzagging of which Sheikh Salaam so greatly disapproved. A glance round showed without any doubt that this water-course received all the drainage of the valley.

For the last two days I had managed to shake myself free of Najm's fatherly care, and instead of being hunted by a camel laden with

provisions—a most inconvenient arrangement, as he was never on the spot when he was wanted—I had taken my hunk of bread and cheese in my pocket and been able to enjoy my lunch when I wanted it. To-day, however, Najm said that there could be no chance of his not being there at the right time, and had persuaded me to allow my lunch to be carried. He did miss me all the same, so when Cash came up at the end of one of the hour's halts, I told him to give the word that I had gone on and that my lunch was to be sent after me. Najm accordingly gave the lunch to one of the Bedwin, and told him to take it to the khawajah. Now it so happened that Peacocke was passing near the spot at the time, and one "khawajah" being very much the same as another to a Bedwin, the lunch-bearer rode up and offered it to him. Now Peacocke was by way of despising lunch, and had always steadily resisted all Najm's entreaties that he might be allowed to send some after him, but he was also unfortunately possessed with a strong sense of humour, and grasping at once the rights of the situation, ruined—let us

hope for ever—his constitution by finishing the last mouthful of the repast which he knew full well was intended for me. I can imagine as I write this the grim smile of delight with which he struggled with the last mouthful of that eternal chicken, and thought of the curses which I was heaping on Najm's innocent head.

Our camp was at the mouth of the Wady Jerafeh, a large valley, which with the Lehyana receives the greater part of the drainage of the eastern Tih. These two wadys joining at this point flow together to the northwards till they are joined by the Wady el Jeib, whose name they then take. This was the point to which Hammid Jad had promised to conduct me, and not one step further would Salaam go. He was afraid of staying even where he was, he said; at any moment the Ma'azy might be down upon him, and if he went any further not only would all his camels be seized, but his own head cut off.

"No great loss if it was," said Cash, when this speech was explained to him.

The aneroids showed our camp to be 200 feet above the sea-level, and I had made up my mind to reach the sea-level again before turning back. Peacocke and I accordingly settled to start off quietly on foot at daybreak, leaving Cash behind to read one of the aneroids at stated intervals. Somehow or other our intention leaked out—I suppose through the walls of the tent—and just as we were going to bed, Najm appeared, saying that as we insisted on going he had thought that we had better have dromedaries, and that he had persuaded Salaam to let us have three.

"Just as you like," I said; "but for goodness' sake do not let any one risk his precious life on our account."

"I shall come, sar," said Najm, and heaving a deep sigh went off to bed.

Next morning, as I was finishing my breakfast, a noise even more awful than usual made me look up, and I was regaled by the sight of Anthonōs rushing at the sheikh with a big knife, then everybody rushed at Anthonōs with big knives. There was too

much swearing going on for it to be very serious, so I sat still and watched the sport. In the midst of the excitement out rushed Petrōs the cook, and seizing Anthonōs and the sheikh by the scruff of their necks performed the feat which is known to Tommy Atkins as "knocking their two blooming heads into one." This was simply his way of peacemaking, and was intended as a gentle hint that the combatants should kiss and make it up, which they did—the kissing part of it, at all events—literally. This Petrōs was a great, hulking, round-shouldered Syrian, standing six feet two in his stockings, and as strong as a horse. Like most big men, he was of an unexcitable nature, and consequently acted as peacemaker—in his own peculiar way—in the perpetual squabbles which took place in camp. Never in my life have I seen such a quarrelsome lot of brutes as my followers were. The Bedwin quarrelled among themselves all day and all night long, and only ceased every now and then for a few minutes, to combine against Yosîf and Anthonōs. These two men were Maronite

Christians from the Lebanon, and if they followed one of the precepts of their faith in loving one another, certainly did not go a step beyond the strict letter of the injunction by loving any one else. I could never arrive at the origin of these quarrels, but, as there were no women in camp, I suppose they must have been about money. The kissing over, Sheikh Salaam suddenly dropped on to the ground with his face to the eastward, and began prostrating himself as if in prayer.

"He is a very religious man, at all events," said Peacocke.

"I only hope his prayer will not be granted," I amiably replied. "Well, Najm, what is all the row about this morning?" I asked that worthy.

"To talk to this people a man must have patience big as this," he replied in the beautiful metaphor of the East, at the same time holding out his joined hands to indicate an imaginary "corporation" which would have made a lord mayor blush.

"At all events they seem to be a very

religious people," I said. "Did you see how Sheikh Salaam prayed directly the fight was over?"

"This people like the beasts, sar," he answered; "he not pray for the God; he not pray for nothing."

"Then what did he go down on his face for just now?"

Najm laughed.

"He dropped half-dollar in the sand."

So it was poor old Mammon to whom Salaam was prostrating himself after all.

Najm is a man who has travelled much and had many strange adventures. For some years he carried the mail from Bagdad to Damascus, a thirteen-days' ride (I think he said) across the desert. Once he started to go to America, but when he arrived at Liverpool, thought that he had had enough of the sea and turned back. Like Anthonōs and Yosîf he is a Maronite Christian. One day he gave us a long account of how in India he had suffered in defence of his religion. It seems that he had travelled overland with some gentleman to the head of the Persian

Gulf, and then gone on to Bombay. There the cholera was raging, and he was advised to take a glass of brandy for his stomach's sake.

"I never take brandy before," he said, "and I never take it since that time. I walk down the street and everything seemed like when I go on the ship. Then I see a big door like this" (pointing to the door of the tent), "and much people going in. I go in too. I find it one synagogue with a big image at the end. Then the bishop he hold up his hands so, and all the people they hold up their hands too, then the bishop bow, and the people bow, but I stand so" (standing strictly at "attention"). "Then they say to me 'bow.' 'No,' I say, 'I worship for the God.' Then they catch me, and run with me through the door and down the street, and take me to the judge.' 'What for you interfere with this people?' say that judge. 'Sar,' I say, 'I worship for the God.' Then the judge say, 'You go away, mind you not come to me again.' Then I go out, and I see some nice cakes in a basket, and I take one, and then the man cry out

and say, 'You take all.' 'No,' I say, 'one enough.' Then this people run at me and take me to that judge. 'What!' say the judge, 'you here one time more, what for you come here?' 'Sar,' I say, 'I want one cake, this people say you take all.' 'You spoil all those cakes,' say the judge. 'No, sar,' I say, 'I only take one.' 'You buy all those cakes,' say the judge; 'now you go away, and stop in your own house.' I not eat all those cakes, sar, in three weeks."

This was, perhaps, the most connected of the many wonderful tales which Najm used to tell me when he came in for orders in the evening. Some were of interminable length, and led one about from end to end of the world in the most startling manner, introducing a host of *dramatis personæ*, and all the bye-tales which they told, in a way which set the labyrinth of the thousand and one nights at defiance. There was one awful ruffian, the intricacies of whose eventful career I had followed for some nights. Having run away with the English girl who had married the Bedwin sheikh, who had mur-

dered the Turkish governor, who had accepted the bribes of the American speculator, who was killed by the Druses (each of the characters with a story), he settled down quietly for a bit as a prisoner for life in a French dungeon. It was not long, however, before he was swimming gaily ashore from a Russian man-of-war in the Persian Gulf. The Russian skipper having told his story, up turns our hero, as fresh as ever, and quietly murdering twenty-six Turkish soldiers, in cold blood, in the Lebanon. I was just wondering whether such a monster could ever have existed in reality, when Najm brought his history to an abrupt close by saying,—

"I knew him well, sar; he very like you, sar," and making a profound bow, wished me good-night and retired.

Although Sheikh Salaam had consented to let us have three dromedaries, nothing would induce him to come with us himself; he told off three men, however, to look after the beasts, and we were just starting off when one of the men repented his rash promise, and steadily refused to move, and as no other volunteers for the forlorn hope were forth-

coming, his place was not filled up. I think it right to mention that the two intrepid men who accompanied us were named Salman and Mohammoud. Salman was the man who had pursued me out of Akabah, and whom I had become rather friendly with, and Mohammoud was a little old man with a merry twinkling eye, who had attached himself to me during the last few days, and who proved to be out and away the best man of the whole party. Cash was left in camp to read the aneroid, but Najm, true to his promise, accompanied us, and as he rode along glancing from side to side, with his Remington rifle across his thighs, tried to look as if he would just like to see the Ma'azy trying to tackle him.

Our route lay down the dry water-course of the Wady Jerafeh, a deep, broad cutting, running between the chalk-hills on the west, and a high gravel-bank in the east. For the first few miles my companions marched along cheerfully enough, but at the end of an hour, Mohammoud and Salman began to show signs of uneasiness, and suggested that it was time to turn back, to which I replied that they were perfectly welcome to do so.

"But how can we go back alone?" said Salaam; "perhaps even now the Ma'azy are between us and the camp, and without your protection we may be murdered."

The obvious reply to this was, that if that was the case, they could not do better than stick to me. By the way, on this occasion, on which of all others one would have thought that they would have carried their guns, I noticed that they had left them behind. I asked the reason of this, and Mohammoud naively replied that they had left them behind for fear they should be stolen if the Ma'azy took us prisoners. In another half-hour Najm joined in the cry to stop.

"By all means stop if you want to," was my invariable reply; but the old man said he would stick to me, but thought that I was very rash.

"You not know this country, sar," he said, "this people very wild people, like the animals. If they only take your clothes it not matter, but suppose they cut off your head?"

I must say for him, however, that when

he saw that I did not mean to stop till I chose, he resigned himself to his fate, and tried to be as cheerful as circumstances would permit.

After another half-hour's ride, my aneroid showed 180 feet below the sea-level, and as this seemed a fair margin to allow for possible atmospheric changes, I thought that we might safely stop.

Najm had said that the Dead Sea was visible from any slight elevation in this neighbourhood, so Peacocke and I climbed one of the low hills to the west, in the hope of seeing it. Whether it is possible to do so I cannot say, as there was a good deal of haze in the northern distance, but although I could not see the Dead Sea, there was no doubt that the Arabah had a steady dip to the north for some four or five miles, and that after that it made a sudden drop. Besides its northerly dip, the bed of the valley, as far as I could see, also sloped from east to west.

While I was making my survey, Mohammoud had taken up a commanding position

on a neighbouring hillock, on the look-out for Ma'azy, while Najm, rifle in hand, did "sentry go" at its base.

"Thank God for that!" fervently exclaimed Salman and Mohammoud, when I said that we might return to camp. Najm's face also brightened a little, but he seemed to think that it was more prudent not to cry till we were quite safely out of the wood.

My journey was now at an end, and it was with some feelings of regret that, as I turned my face towards camp, I reflected that each step was now taking me nearer to bills, starched collars, tall hats, and all the other annoyances of civilization. Although the journey was ended, the work could hardly be said to have been begun. My original intention, as I have said, was to have made a rapid dash up, making a rough sketch on the way, and getting the levels approximately by means of aneroids. The laziness of the Alawîn, however, and the consequent enforced slowness of the march upwards had made it possible for Peacocke to make a sketch, which observations for latitude and a plane-table sketch at Rishi—made independently of pacing—proved to be

quite as accurate as anything short of a regular trigonometrical survey could be; and the same cause had enabled me to work up by steps with the aneroids, and get as accurate a result as can be obtained with these instruments. This is not saying much, however, and in a *reconnaissance*, the object of which was to prove the possibility or impossibility of making a canal through the district, an error of a few feet in the heights was infinitely more important than an error of a few hundreds yards in the distance. This being the case, I abandoned the original idea of making a large-scale survey on the return-journey, but adhered to that of running a regular chain of levels down to the coast. So many travellers had visited this valley and brought home such wholly different reports as to the height of the watershed, that I was anxious to settle the question definitely, once for all; and in making up my mind to do this, I did not forget the remark with which General Walker prefaces his excellent paper on "Observations with Theodolites," in the "Hints to Travellers" of the Geographical Society. General Walker

says, "If he (the traveller) has no better instruments nor greater skill than his predecessors, his results may differ widely from theirs, but they will not be more worthy of confidence, and while causing much perplexity and inconvenience to geographers, they will only exhibit with certainty the degree of uncertainty that is still attached to the problem under investigation." Now, without venturing to pretend for a moment that my skill is greater than that of my predecessors, I think that I can fairly lay claim —by reason of the greater accuracy of the instruments which I used—to having brought home more accurate results.

As soon as we returned to camp the leveling staves, the theodolite, and the perambulator were unpacked, and we had a rehearsal for the morrow's work. I felt a little doubtful as to how the Bedwin would take to the strange instruments which I was going to ask them to handle. Salaam did make a few remarks on the subject, and even ventured to doubt that they were connected with picture-making; but he was promptly snubbed

by Najm, who said that any fool knew that these things were the first requisites of an artist.

Salman and Mohammoud were told off to carry the staves, an honour which the latter did not seem to relish much at first. It was very comical to see the way in which he stalked them as they lay on the ground, approaching them gradually in a decreasing spiral, with his eye fixed steadily on them, as if he expected that at any moment they might jump up and seize him by the throat. Cash accompanied Mohammoud, who had the back station. Salman had orders to stick to Peacocke, who led the way and plotted the traverse, while I marched in the centre with the theodolite.

I told Najm to get a quiet word with these men, and tell them, when out of the sheikh's hearing, that if they did their duty well they would get handsome "backsheesh" for themselves; but he said that it was quite useless trying to conceal what I gave them from the sheikh, as they would be the first to tell him what they had got, and offer him his share.

Najm characterized their conduct by his favourite epithet of "stupid," which for once came in appropriately.

The exact relation between the sheikh and his tribe often puzzled me. That he had a great hold over them was evident, from the fact that they allowed him to take the half of all their earnings, and even of presents which were given to them, yet it was equally evident that they had not the slightest respect for him, nor could he maintain any discipline whatever among them. They would abuse him to his face, laugh at him, and even fight with him. Once Aïd rushed at him with his clubbed musket, and a rough-and-tumble ensued, in which the sheikh came off considerably the second-best; but no one ran to his assistance, and no one seemed to think Aïd's conduct anything out of the common.

CHAPTER XI.

Thlah and Lehyana—Line for a railway—A difference of opinion—Najm to the fore—Levelling under difficulties—Sporting instincts—A heavy shower—A wonderful change—An impostor exposed—A new governor—An anxious moment—Advantages of a beautiful mother—Yosîf shows fight—Matters look serious—Reconciliation.

Two days' levelling up the Jerafeh and Lehyana water-courses brought us back to the Rishi watershed. I had ordered the camp to be pitched at this place, but, for some reason best known to himself, Sheikh Salaam chose to pitch it a good three miles further to the north, which necessitated my walking that distance back when we had done our work; and when one has to carry a thirty-six-pound theodolite on one's shoulder all day, one is not particularly keen about doing any extra miles.

Our camp before crossing the watershed on the upward journey had been pitched at the mouth of the Wady Thlah, a good-sized valley, running upwards in a north-westerly direction, and on coming back up the Wady Lehyana I had noticed that that valley appeared nearly to join the Thlah at its head, the two being apparently separated by a low, narrow range of hills. I determined, therefore, to devote a day to exploring them, not so much from any hope that the water-parting between would prove to be any lower than that at Rishi, but because I thought that it would be more satisfactory to know, at all events, that it was not so. The camels as usual were not ready when I wanted to start, so I set off on foot with Peacocke and followed by old Mohammoud. I found that the valley which I had seen running up to the Thlah was not the Lehyana, but a water-course, whose name I could not learn, which ran into it from the south-east. The Lehyana itself rises more to the west in the Tih Plateau. A seven-miles walk brought us to a broad sandy saddle between two

limestone hills, and in the saddle the Thlah and the tributary of the Lehyana took their rise. The aneroids showed its height to be 876 feet above the sea-level, so there was now no hope of finding any passage lower than that of Rishi. If at any time the construction of a railway were contemplated to connect the Mediterranean with the Gulf of Akabah; down the Lehyana, and through this saddle, would undoubtedly be the best way to carry it. The descent from the Tih is here a gradual one from the lowest part of its western edge, and once on the Tih the descent to the Mediterranean could be made almost without a cutting.

As I intended to stay four days in the neighbourhood, I had told Sheikh Salaam, before starting, to move the camp to the southern foot of Rishi, as the most central position from which to do my work. On getting to the mouth of the Thlah, hot and tired after a fifteen-miles walk, great was my disgust to see the tents at the foot of the sand-hills near Wady Ghurundel, a good hour's walk from the place I had mentioned.

This was the third time that Sheikh Salaam had played me this trick, and I thought it about time to show him who was master. As a matter of fact he was, but I do not think he knew it. The tents, it is true, were mine, and I was at liberty to pitch them where I liked, but without Salaam and his camels I could not well move them, and even if I did I could not move my provisions, or carry my water. Now, if there is one thing in the world which makes a man look more foolish than another, it is after having given an order being obliged to stand by and see it calmly disobeyed. Not caring to put myself in this position, I did not give any orders, but gave Salaam for about two minutes the benefit of learning exactly what I thought of him, and told him that I did not want to have anything more to do with him or his lazy crew, and that I should sleep in the place where I had ordered the camp to be pitched. Saying this, I walked off, telling Cash to follow me with my pea-jacket and fur bag. I do not exactly know why, but my speech and action produced a marvellous

effect. Sheikh Salaam was having his head shaved, the cook was just starting the dinner, and Yosîf had just filtered the supply of water for the night. Up jumped the sheikh regardless of the razor which still touched his head. Out of sheer astonishment Yosîf stood open-mouthed while the "precious fluid" (this is, I believe, the correct expression in the desert) trickled on to the sand. The cook swore audibly, and poor old Najm looked as if he was going to cry. Before their astonishment had subsided, and they had had time to think of repartees, I had marched off. In this I was wrong, as the scene which followed seems to have been a most amusing one. As soon as I had gone, Najm gave orders for the camp to be struck, upon which they all, with one accord said that they would see Najm further first. Then Najm lost his excellent temper, and, fixing the bayonet into his Remington rifle, prepared to charge. To quote the words of one of our greatest writers of fiction, "alone he braved the fury of the mob." The first to leave the ranks of the rebels was Yosîf,

who appears to have been converted by a remark of Cash's, to the effect that if they did not move, some one would have to walk a long way in the dark with my dinner. Petrōs, possibly thinking that his *chef-d'œuvre* might be spoiled in the transit, next joined the side of discipline, and before I had walked three quarters of a mile I had the satisfaction of seeing the tents all down.

The survey so far had been carried on without the slightest interruption, but I was beginning to feel a little uneasy, as I remembered that the other party which had left us at the watershed ought by this time to have reached Gaza, whence the news would be certain to spread that I was in the Arabah. We had a good deal of work before us, so to save time I settled to run a chain of levels and traverse across the watershed from Wady Houar to the west end, while Peacocke made his inch-to-a-mile sketch of the Rishi range.

Early next morning I started, looking, as Jack said when he landed at Ismaïlia covered with pouches and bottles, "like a blooming

Christmas tree." On my belt was an aneroid, a knife, and a tobacco-pouch; on one side hung a water-bottle and the small camera, and on the other my field-glasses; on a strap over my chest was the pouch which held the field-book; strapped on to my left wrist was the sketching-board, and on to my right my sjambok adorned with a pocket-handkerchief to make a flag; from my neck hung a whistle and a piece of india-rubber; over my shoulder I carried the theodolite.

As I had ten miles to go before getting to my ground, I settled to ride there, but as usual there was a hitch about the camels, and when it was time to start Cash's was not ready, and as he said he would just as soon walk for a bit, I started off, leaving word for the other camel to be sent on at once. I do not know whether any one ever attempted to follow me, but if they did they never succeeded in catching me up, and when I got to my ground there was no one but Mohammoud to take care of the one I had been riding. However, the old man was equal to

the occasion, and said that he could easily work the back-staff and look after the camel too; but I do not think that he quite bargained for such an afternoon as he had. Seven devils seemed to have possessed that camel; the moment Mohammoud let go of him to hold the staff up, off the beast would go at a right angle to our line of march, and when I sounded an advance on my whistle the old man had to dash off, catch the camel, and then make his way to the forward station to relieve Cash. It must have been very tantalizing to him to see his charge wandering away, while he had to stand stock-still holding the staff, but he was rather proud, all the same, of being trusted to hold the staff all alone, and stuck to his post like a man. As he was a great smoker, and he could not light his pipe while he was holding his staff, I offered once to send a man with him to relieve him when he wanted to smoke, but he said he would rather do it alone. Salman also did his work very well, but his sporting instincts were even more powerful than his sense of duty, and the sight of

Rishar in pursuit of a hare or gazelle was more than he could stand. Off would fly Salman on these occasions, levelling-staff and all, and operations had to be suspended till the hunt was over. I only once saw Mohammoud yield to a temptation of this sort. Rishar was coursing a rock-rabbit, who, rather hard pressed, foolishly took refuge in a shallow hole within twenty yards of Mohammoud. This was more than Bedwin nature could stand, and off he dashed, and after a little scraping with his hands pulled the unfortunate cony out by his hind legs, and brought it to me alive triumphantly. Not knowing what tortures he might put it to, I made him cut its throat at once. In justice to the Bedwin, however, I must say I do not think that he is given to needless cruelty. He certainly does not share the opinion of the average Englishman, that, in daring to be one degree uglier than himself, a beetle or spider has committed a crime which can only be adequately punished by a painful death, and that he is the most proper person to carry out the sentence—this duty

being rendered the more acceptable to him from the fact that the insect cannot possibly hit him back.

The eccentricities of the camel of course delayed us a good deal, and as I had to plot the traverse, as well as take the levels, we did not get on very fast, and at sunset I found myself nearly twelve miles from camp. However I had done a good half of my work, and when I got to camp Peacocke said that he did not think that he had much more than a day's work left to do. We were just congratulating ourselves on this fact, as we settled down to work after dinner, when a pattering on the tent told us that the long-threatened rain had come at last, and down it came with a vengeance.

"I am glad I did not choose to-night to sleep out in," I was just saying, when I felt something cold touch my feet, and, looking down, found that the floor of the tent was an inch deep in water; in two minutes more it was two inches deep, and then three and four. The same fact seemed to have struck everybody at once, and great and loud was

the shouting. In rushed Yosîf, looking as if he considered this thunderstorm a personal affront to himself, and at once began to pile everything on the top of everything else. He was followed by Najm, also looking greatly aggrieved, but, whatever he may have thought in Arabic, he could find no stronger vent to his feelings in English than the remark that it was "too bad."

In ten minutes the rain ceased, and a bright moon broke through the clouds. The scene was a curious one; to the right and left were the stony hills standing out as black as ever against the moonlit sky, but what a change was there in the bed of the valley! The parched, monotonous yellow ground, of which our eyes had grown so weary, had disappeared, and in its place stood a broad, shining lake, down the centre of which led the silver moon-path into the black rocks of Ghurundel.

I had always rather despised beds as a useless incumbrance in camp, but the shower of this evening made me for once acknowledge that there are occasions on which

they come in handy, and as I stepped into bed out of four inches of water I congratulated myself that I had not left the "rubbish" at Akabah.

The shower had cooled the ground so much, that next morning refraction, our greatest enemy while levelling, was reduced to a minimum; so I gave up, for the time being, the comparatively unimportant section of the watershed, and devoted the day to the main line of levels down the valley, and in doing so gave myself a satisfactory proof of the utter unreliability of the human eye as an instrument for measuring slopes. I have already shown how I made up my mind that the ground between Wadys Byân and Aheimeh was a watershed, and that its northern slope stretched down to the marsh under Rishi. Now when it came to levelling over this ground what was my surprise, on arriving at what I thought to be the top, to find that I had fallen forty feet! Even then I was ready to believe anything sooner than that my eyes had deceived me, but, as Peacocke said, "it is no use arguing with a level," and I had to

accept the fact, which luckily the recent thunderstorm enabled me to confirm. The water-course, which, broken probably by the action of sand and wind, had so much helped to deceive me before, was now wet throughout its entire course, and the little grasses and bits of stick, &c., which were collected against inequalities in the bed, or trailed towards the south, all proved conclusively that the water flowed towards El Ta'abah.

The next day we were able to complete our work on Rishi, and on the morning of the 17th of December fairly started on our homeward journey, levelling steadily all day, and covering, on an average, from seven to eight miles of ground. I now saw how right I had been, apart from any considerations of prudence, not to begin levelling from Akabah ; this ground is so extremely deceptive, that unless I had been over almost every inch of it before, and found out which were its lowest parts, I should have wasted endless time in trying to follow them with my chain of levels, and even then should probably not have arrived at so satisfactory a result.

Levelling is dull work, and we had little to break its monotony till we reached Ain Ghudiân, where I heard that the new governor of Akabah had arrived from Cairo. I had had absolutely no news of what the world was doing for the last month, and my latest information on the subject which at present most interested me was that the Porte was determined to stop the survey being made, and that the Egyptian authorities were very likely to assist them in this respect. The first question, therefore, which struck me on hearing of the governor's arrival was "Has he any orders about me?" Not being able to answer it satisfactorily, I could only push on with the work harder than ever. I had just crossed Mekreh Hadîd when I noticed a party of about half a dozen men on dromedaries advancing from the direction of Akabah. Now I had scarcely seen a soul out of my own party since I had been in the valley, and the sight of this large party naturally excited my curiosity. Keeping my eyes on them, I saw them join Najm and the sheikh, who were about half a mile to my

left, and then, accompanied by my own men, turn towards me. "I expect this is the governor," said Peacocke, as I joined him at the forward station. "I expect it is," I answered. We neither of us said any more, but, both struck by the same thought, pushed on to complete one more length before we were stopped.

"This man has come from Cairo with a letter for you," said Najm, as the party approached, pointing to one of the strangers. This was a relief, at all events, but a letter from Cairo! ten days across the desert by a special messenger!—it must be something very important, and I will bet my new hat it is nothing pleasant, I thought as I took it from the man's hand. It proved to be for one of the other party, so I returned it to the messenger, and told him that he had better go on to Gaza, at which his face lengthened very considerably, as he had probably counted on a pleasant rest at Akabah and several good dinners at my expense. As some slight consolation, however, Sheikh Salaam handed over to him the obnoxious boy, in the hope

that he might help to while away the weary hours of his long journey across the desert. The boy used to assert his opinion on all subjects, and order every one about as if he was master of the whole camp. Once I asked Najm why the men stood his impertinence, and whether he was a son or any near relation of Hammid Jad's. "No," said Najm, "but he has a beautiful mother who lives in the mountains." And this very mysterious answer was all that I could ever get out of him on the subject.

In the evening Yosîf was kind enough to afford us a little excitement to break the monotony of our journey. Yosîf, as I have said, was a Maronite Christian from the Lebanon, not a bad fellow in his way, and very willing and respectful, but of a most excitable temperament. When he first came to me he was dressed in the loose trousers and short round jacket of his country, but in the desert he discarded this dress for a very æsthetic velveteen costume of knee-breeches and a round jacket, in which he looked a sort of cross between a Spanish matador and the

"merry Swiss boy" of opera-bouffe. He was rather a good-looking fellow and knew it, and had received from the Bedwin the nickname of Abu-Hassan, or "the father of beauty." I do not know whether he resented their "chaff" or not, but certain it was that he had taken a most particular dislike to Sheikh Salaam and his men, and never lost an opportunity of quarrelling with them. So constant had these quarrels been that I had long since ceased to notice them.

I was busy totalling up the levels, inwardly cursing the awful din that was going on outside the tent, when in rushed the two sheikhs with their clothes torn to ribbons and closely followed by Yosîf, armed with one of the stakes on which the camp-lanterns were hung. Then came a troop of Bedwin, followed by Najm and Anthonōs, and the rear was brought up by Petrōs, the peace-maker, puffing at his eternal short clay pipe, and calmly waiting for an opportunity to bring about a reconciliation by his own infallible and original receipt. Every one insisted on talking at once, so having told them several

times that I would listen to them when they chose to speak one at a time, and finding my remarks wholly disregarded, I packed them all out of the tent, and tried to go on with my work. Then the row began outside again ten times worse than ever, and the shaking of the pole showed that a general "rough and tumble" was going on among the tent-ropes. In the midst of it all in rushed Yosîf and made a dive into the saddle-bags for his revolver. I thought it was now time for me to take some part in the proceedings, so I knocked him down and sat on him—a masterly manœuvre which, I believe, saved two worthless and several valuable lives. I have little doubt that Yosîf really meant business, and had he killed Salaam, the Bedwin would certainly have killed him, and, as I afterwards discovered that they were very indignant with me for not interfering, would probably, when their blood was up, have done their best to polish off the whole party of Christians.

Having extracted a promise from Yosîf that he would not recommence hostilities, I

let him go, and went on with my work, thinking that the row was over for the night. It was not until Najm came in after dinner for orders that I found out things were really rather serious. To begin with, Salman was rather badly hurt, having been hit on the back by the lantern-stake. The worst part of it, however, was that the Bedwin had refused their usual ration of coffee and tobacco, saying that they would take nothing from us, and were vowing vengeance, saying that I ought to have interfered and beaten Yosîf. They also said that they would not move in the morning, but would send into Akabah for the governor. Now the governor was the last person whom I wished to see just then. I did not want to put off the levelling for a day, and I did not want the governor to see me using instruments so very suggestive of a railway or canal, as a theodolite and levelling-staves. I therefore sent for the sheikhs and had a little quiet talk with them. It turned out that Yosîf was quite in the wrong, and that the cause of the row was neither a woman nor money this

time, but an old brown earthenware dish. It seemed that the unfortunate Salaam had asked for the loan of this dish, which Najm had granted, but on his going to fetch it Yosîf had promptly "gone for him," and being backed up by Anthonōs, had treated the sheikh pretty roughly. Then the other Bedwin had joined in, and a general skirmish had ensued, in which, besides cutting Sheikh Salaam's face, Yosîf had severely hurt Salman's back with the lantern-stake. This stake was a rather powerful weapon, a long, thick stick into which were driven half a dozen tenter-hooks, and, from what the sheikhs said, I was rather afraid that Salman's spine was injured. I told the sheikh that I was very sorry for what had happened, and that, had he only explained the matter quietly to me before, I would have stopped Yosîf. Now my only wish was that justice should be done, and that I quite agreed with him that the governor was the proper person to administer it, but, at the same time, I did not think that it was likely that he would take the trouble to ride out to our camp to

settle the quarrel. The palaver was a long one, but before it was over I had got the sheikh into a good humour again. I then went to the camp-fire to see the injured man. I had expected that the men might be a little uncivil at first, but they were all perfectly respectful, standing up when I neared the fire, and not sitting down again till I asked them to do so. For some time I looked in vain for Salman, and it was not till one of the men had lifted up the corner of a bundle of rags which lay near the fire, and disclosed the patient, that I discovered his whereabouts. With very great care his arms were bared, and I was shown that a piece of skin about the size of a threepenny-bit had been knocked off his elbow. I said it was a dreadful wound, and applied a wet bandage to it. Then, amid dreadful groans from the patient, his back was bared, and I found a good bruise on the right side, well clear of the spine. As I had not any arnica with me, I put a few drops of laudanum on a compress, and applied it to the part affected. I then gave him ten drops of chlorodyne to

send him to sleep, and left him amidst a shower of thanks from every one. "Great gentlemen always were great gentlemen," said one old man, "but it was those servants who gave all the trouble."

CHAPTER XII.

An economical executioner—The gulf again—The Admiralty chart—Old friends—A modest governor—Troubled in his mind—A bad day—A painful leave-taking—A little geology—El Kantera—The postman—A warning to travellers—The Houiât—Sheikh Louefeh—Abumazarîk—The cairn.

NEXT morning, as I saw the men preparing to strike the camp, I took it for granted that the little misunderstanding of the previous evening had been forgotten, and thought it better to ask no questions; but just as I was starting off the sheikhs came to me to ask whether I would administer justice myself or leave it to the governor, adding that they would prefer that I should do it. I was rather taken aback by this, but having no wish to take down Yosîf's velveteen breeches and perform the duties of a head master, I said that, much as I wished

to please them in this matter, I thought that it would show a want of respect for the governor if I were to arrogate his duties myself within so short a distance of his residence; if Yosîf had misbehaved himself further up the valley, I should of course have been compelled to take the law into my own hands, but here I must decline to interfere. Although they were not quite satisfied with the answer, they had to accept it, as of course there was no possible reason why they should not take the matter before the governor if they chose. The fact of the matter was they had only used the governor's name to frighten me when they thought that I was backing up Yosîf; now that they saw that I was on their side, they thought that they might as well make use of me as executioner, not forgetting the fact that whereas I should perform the duties for nothing, his excellency and his subordinates would probably require several "reminders" before the sentence was carried out. Indeed I do not believe that they ever had the slightest intention of carrying the case before

the governor; at all events they never did do so. So Yosîf was considerably the gainer by my decision, but I thought it as well to tell him that last night I had waited to see who was in the right, and the result was that he had nearly got us into a serious mess. Next time I saw him fighting, I should take it for granted that he was in the wrong, and act accordingly.

Three hours' levelling over the marsh brought us to the head of the gulf. It was a moment that I had been looking forward to with much anxiety. Any accident might have disabled the theodolite and made our past work useless, and at any moment we might have been stopped. "Once let me plant the theodolite safely on the beach at Akabah," I had said a dozen times, "and I shall not care what may happen after that." Yet such is the perversity of human nature, that no sooner was the last level entered in the book than I began to worry about something else. "What an infernal nuisance!" were, I believe, my first words on stepping on to the longed-for sands.

"What is the matter, now?" said Peacocke, who was lying on his stomach and digging with his fingers for little shells.

The matter was that a great black cloud was making the best of its way towards the sun. To explain why this annoyed me, I must go back a little. Taking it for granted that the latitude of Akabah given in the Admiralty chart was correct, I had not taken any observation there on my outward journey, aud the first observation which I took was a meridian altitude of β Ceti at Ain Ghudiân. This gave me a latitude of 29° 53′ 9″ N., that is to say, 25′ 9″ north of Akabah as fixed on the Admiralty chart. Peacocke was very much distressed at this result, as his pacing only made us 21′ north of Akabah. Could it be possible, he asked, that in a distance of little over twenty miles he should have dropped four and a half. Knowing as I did the accuracy of his work, I thought that it was quite impossible, but being also confident of the correctness of my observation, I was at a loss to explain the discrepancy. My next observation was

a meridian altitude of the sun at the watershed at Rishi, which again proved that Peacocke's pacing made us four and a half miles too near Akabah, that is to say, that, having dropped four and a half miles in the first twenty, he had not lost a yard in the next twenty-three; and I must mention that he had not altered his scale in any way since the discovery at Ain Ghudian. A series of observations up and down the valley gave the same result, and Ain Defeyeh, which Peacocke made to be nine miles from Akabah, my observation of the sun showed to be thirteen and a half. The limit of the error was now, therefore, greatly reduced, and if Peacocke had dropped his four miles at all, he must have done so between Ain Defeyeh and Akabah. It is true that his traverse back agreed exactly with his original sketch, and I was perfectly satisfied in my own mind that Ain Defeyeh was correctly placed by him; still, of course, it would be much more satisfactory to get an observation at Akabah, and be able to show that his measurements agreed throughout with my observations.

We had got so accustomed to fine weather that the possibility of the sun being clouded over at Akabah had never even struck me. There the cloud was, however, and nothing more was to be done with the sun, on this day at all events.

Besides settling the question of the latitude, there was still plenty to be done, levels to be reduced, sections plotted, sketches traced, and a dozen odd jobs which I had been obliged to put off till now. I was looking forward, therefore, to having a quiet couple of days at Akabah, in which to get rid of the back work before we began travelling again, but alas! peace there was none! The first person whom I saw on entering camp was Hammid Effendi, register in hand and panting for "backsheesh." Then came Abdullah, and after him Hammid Jad, beaming with benevolence, and trying to look as if he had never stolen more than half-a-crown in his life. Of course they all came into my tent, and drank coffee, and smoked cigarettes *ad infinitum*, said how pleased they were to see me back again, and

how they would like a little something, be it ever so small, to remember me by. This had been going on for about a quarter of an hour when Najm asked me if I would like to see the governor. "Certainly," I said, "if he will do me the honour of calling on me." Whereupon Najm dived into the kitchen, and brought forth a little grey-haired man, in black cloth trousers, with a braid stripe, frock-coat, and tarbush, and presented him to me as the governor. His Excellency had, it seemed, been waiting for me for the last two hours, and had whiled away the time in conversation with Petrōs, before the kitchen-fire. He was a pleasant, intelligent man, with rather an energetic face, and I pitied him sincerely in being buried in such an out-of-the-way place among such a set of lazy thieves. He had been much troubled in his mind about me, he said. He had received orders from Cairo to pay particular attention to three Englishmen who were travelling in the Arabah, and the order had been brought by the same messenger who carried the letter. Hearing that I was

coming he had at once sent the man on to meet me, but now he heard that I had refused to receive the letter, saying that it was not for me. As Professor Hull and his party ought by this time to have been safely at Gaza, and it was impossible that the governor of Akabah could render them any assistance, I thought that I might as well point out that it was extremely unlikely that the Egyptian officials should have so particularly mentioned the party as consisting of three Englishmen if they had meant that which consisted of five. At the same time I had kept my movements so secret, and had impressed so strongly on my friends that I wanted no official assistance, that I hardly thought it likely that the order should really refer to me. Before leaving, the governor asked me whether I would like him to let off some fireworks in my honour. I am afraid I rather hurt his feelings by refusing his kind offer, but I proposed to devote the night to star-observing, and I thought that sky-rockets and Roman candles shooting about all over the

heavens would not be likely to add much to the accuracy of my results.

I had intended to make a section of the valley in the neighbourhood of Ain Defeyeh on my way down, but the news of the governor's arrival had rather hastened my movements, and I had thought it better to run straight down to the sea first. If I had been able to get the sun the day I arrived, I should have had the next day free for this job, but as it was I thought it more important to get the latitude, so stayed in camp myself while Peacocke went out to run the chain of levels. As it turned out, I should have done far better to have gone out myself; for the sun was clouded at noon, and my life was made a burden to me by the persecution of the people who wanted presents. I must say in justice to Hammid Effendi, however, that, having received the pound which I gave him for his trouble with the barometer, he never bothered me again. The most pertinacious of my tormentors was Abdullah, who had not forgotten that he had asked for a revolver, indeed he now

remembered that I had promised him one, and told me a touching tale of how his little boy had whispered to him that he was certain to get it. After events proved that prophecy is not that little boy's strong point.

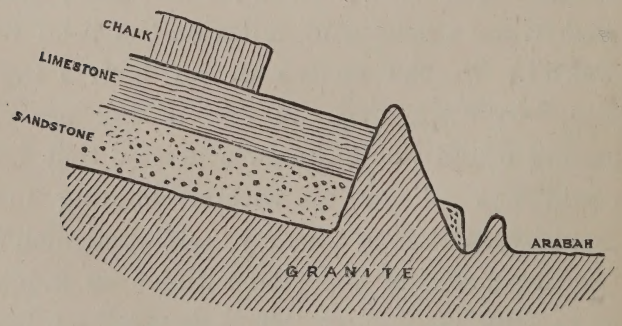
As I intended to return to Suez by way of Nakh'l, the Alawîn, who cannot travel on that route, for fear of their enemies, the Houitât, were reluctantly compelled to hand me over to another tribe, the Houiât, and I need hardly say that my late companions were not forgetful of the fact that I was going to leave them on the morrow. Salman and Mohammoud, the two men who had formed my levelling staff, had done their work capitally, and as I wanted to mark my approval of them, and show, for the benefit of future travellers, that civility and willingness pay, I refused to give Sheikh Salaam anything, and then before him gave Salman and Mohammoud a present of money each, and, in addition, a knife to Salman and a revolver to Mohammoud. It was a treat to watch the rage bursting out of Salaam's ugly face while this was going on, but my

satisfaction did not last long, as before I had left Akabah an hour I heard that both the knife and the revolver had been transferred from their rightful owners into the capacious belt of Hammid Jad.

The morning of Monday the 24th was simply a concentrated essence of the day before. The harpies who had tried the effect of fifteen hours' importunity on Sunday now vied with each other in an attempt to concentrate the same amount into one hour. Leave-takings are always painful, and this promised to be a particularly painful one; so taking advantage of the temporary distraction which a fight about the loads caused, I sneaked quietly off among the palms, and walked for a couple of miles on the road to Nakh'l. In the course of an hour I was joined by Najm and the rest of the party, among whom was Salman, who said that he could not let me go without bidding me good-bye. Uttering a hearty "Ma'assalemeh" (go in peace), he departed without so much as hinting at further "backsheesh." I believe the man was really grateful to me for dressing his rather imaginary wound.

I had got the latitude of Akabah by an altitude of the pole-star, and it had agreed with my observation up the valley, but I wanted, if possible, to get the corroborative evidence of the sun, and this was my last chance; so, much to the disgust of every one, I made a six-hours halt on the beach, and although I did not get a meridian altitude, I got three at equal intervals near the meridian, which answered the same purpose.

Leaving the head of the gulf at its north-western extremity, we began our ascent on to the Tih plateau up the dry bed of the Wady el Haserat, a broad torrent which receives the drainage of all the neighbouring hills.



At first its bed lies in the deep cutting it

has made for itself in the *débris* of which the lower slopes are composed; it then winds its way among the granite and syenite foot-hills, and at El Kantera—a substantial stone bridge—runs through the gorge which separates the limestone, of which the main portion of this range is composed, from the igneous rocks which break through it.

Through the gorge, and indeed the whole way to Suez, runs a road which with a very little labour might be made passable for wheeled vehicles; its line is carefully chosen, and its steeper gradients toned down by cutting through the rock. An inscription on the side of one of these cuttings states that the road was made by the same Sultan Selim who built the fort at Akabah, and that it was made for the use of the pilgrims going to Mecca.

Our camp was pitched in the gorge a few hundred yards short of El Kantera, and a wilder and more inhospitable spot it would be difficult to imagine. Not a stick of anything which even a camel would eat was visible; not even a lichen was to be seen on

the bare rocky walls—nothing but the towering red granite rocks on the one side, and the cold limestone cliffs on the other, and at our feet the water-worn boulders, too, reminded one of the torrent which at times sweeps between the rocks, carrying everything before it.

After leaving El Kantera, the road passes through a very narrow limestone gorge, and then winds up the mountain-side by a steep but even ascent, from the top of which one obtains one's last view of the Gulf of Akabah and the Arabah; below us, to the right, lies the Wady el Afteh, separating the limestone from the underlying sandstone, on to which formation the road presently descends in the wady.

A three-hours march brought us on to the edge of the Tih, a dreary flat of stones broken only here and there by low limestone ridges and an occasional granite peak. A collection of graves marks here the first halting-place of the pilgrims on the road from Akabah to Suez.

A long dreary ride brought us to our halt-

ing-place near El Maleh (the salt place). We had not been long in camp when that strangest of all strange things in the desert, a stranger, made his appearance. He turned out to be the postman carrying letters from Akabah to Nakh'l; he was a fine, manly young fellow, quite coming up to one's ideal of the noble Bedwin, and looking just the man to do this long journey across the desert all alone. However, he seemed to have no objection to doing it in company if he got a chance, and announced his intention of travelling with us for a couple of days. When I heard who he was I was in hopes that I might be able to send by him some tracings and papers which I was anxious to get rid of, but he said that he only carried letters to Nakh'l, and did not know whether any messenger would be going on from that place.

On the following morning we had another example of the unreliability of the human eye. From what we had seen in the Arabah, we had been expecting for some time to find chalk upon this plateau, and I had been

anxiously looking out for it all the morning. I was riding ahead, and, rounding a slight shoulder in the ground, saw before me a cliff of the long-expected chalk, but upon the top of it a most distinct strata of limestone. I am not an eminent geologist: had I been one, it would probably have struck me that chalk, being the newer formation, could hardly be under the oolite unless the strata had been turned absolutely topsy-turvy; as it was, it took me about ten minutes to arrive at this fact, and I was considerably disturbed in my mind in the meanwhile. If the chalk lay under the oolite, all our theories about the formation of the Arabah were at fault.

"What is that?" I shouted back to Peacocke, pointing to the cliff.

"Chalk, I suppose," he answered.

"Then what the dickens is that limestone doing upon the top of it?" I asked, in a tone which implied that I held him responsible for all the eccentricities of nature.

"I nearly had a fit when I saw it," was all the answer I got.

"What is that on the top of that chalk?" I then asked Cash.

"Why, the same as the stuff up at the shed yonder," he said, without any hesitation.

As it was past eleven, I called a halt for lunch, and climbed up the hill to see for myself what this mysterious stuff was, and found that it was simply chalk discoloured by the weather, and that the whiteness of the lower part of the cliff was due to the outer coat having crumbled away. But for the theory about the Arabah, I should undoubtedly have gravely noted in my pocket-book that the chalk was here overlaid by oolite or nummulitic limestone. This chalk contains layers of some sharp, hard stones, which take the place of the flints in English chalk, but they certainly are not flints, appearing to be more of the nature of lava than anything else. As I had never seen or heard of anything corresponding to these stones, I brought a few specimens back with me, a proceeding which seemed greatly to amuse the Bedwin. The Bedwin, however, is ever

ready to turn all human weaknesses to his own advantage, and my little weakness for collecting stones having once been discovered, was seized upon as a probably easy method of extorting "backsheesh." The bed of the Arabah is composed almost entirely of stones, and I believe that nothing but want of time prevented the whole of their number being offered to me in turn. After a time, as one bit of rubbish after another was pronounced by me to be *baitâl* (worthless), the supply did decrease a little, till by chance one of the men picked up an old Persian coin. He would have been just as contented had I given him a pinch of tobacco, but I rather foolishly gave him a shilling, and from that moment rubbish was positively poured upon me, but without any further access of wealth to the pourers, as long as I was in the hands of the Alawîn. My new guardians, however, had heard of my proclivities, and started on the first day by pouring into my lap a rare collection of old bottle-necks, jug-handles, and such like, with which the Haj route is pretty freely strewn. At last my camel-

driver, Aliân, did bring me something which seemed to be worth having, a little, light-blue, opaque stone, which if it was not a turquoise, was at all events like one, and as I gave a pinch of tobacco for each specimen that was brought me, I soon had a largish collection.

They were a very nice, pleasant set of fellows, these Houiât, always taking whatever one chose to give them without grumbling, never asking for presents, and going where they were told and stopping when they were told, without wanting to argue the matter. Their sheikh, Louefeh, was a capital man, as wild-looking a young fellow as one could wish to see, and a man I would a good deal sooner ride beside as a friend, than meet as an enemy. He had none of the cringing, begging ways of Hammid Jad and his tribe, but was always most respectful and obliging, and kept his men in capital order.

Soon after our first sight of the chalk we entered the Wady Abumazarik, a broad water-course running between chalk cliffs, and receiving the drainage of the greater part of the

Western Tih. Sheikh Louefeh told me that it emptied itself into the Jerafeh.

Under the bank of one of the numerous water-courses which intersect the district I had noticed a largish heap of stones. It was in a curious position for such a cairn, which is almost always placed on a hill-top, or in some conspicuous position. On approaching it the Bedwin one after another ran at it and began pelting it with stones, and insulting it in various ways which, not being the late lamented Captain Gulliver, I should probably be called over the coals for mentioning, shouting at the same time "Yallah anhou" (God damn him). "Kool yallah anhou, khawajah" (say God damn him, gentleman), they all shouted as I came up to the cairn, but before offering up this little prayer I thought that I might as well know for whom I was praying, and why I should wish him to be damned.

CHAPTER XIII.

The story of Imri the devil of Abumazarik—A narcotic—The watershed—Bir Abasseyeh—A good mount—An offer of help—A valuable life.

Under that heap of stones lay all that was mortal of one Imri, Imri el Sheitân, or Imri the devil of Abumazarik, as he was called by his acquaintance—a man who had at one time been the terror of the whole neighbourhood—a man to whom nothing was sacred, not even the laws of hospitality which the most reckless men and the most godless marauders were, as a rule, afraid to break. To accept a night's shelter and a meal, and then to ride away before daybreak with two or three of his host's camels, seemed as natural and proper a proceeding to Imri, as stealing a Christian's purse to any one else. Of course this sort of thing could not last long, and

shunned by half the world, and chased by the other half, Imri became a true prototype of the founder of his race, "his hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against him." Unable to cope with his wary brethren of the desert, Imri bethought him of the pious pilgrims who yearly flocked across the Tih on their way to the holy city. These, he rightly thought, would fall an easy prey, and for many years he lived on the spoils which he collected in such an infamous manner. It is true that what we may presume he called "the season" was extremely short, consisting of the two or three days during which the pilgrims remained in his district on their way to and from Mecca, and, as all the world knows, there is not much left to rob a pilgrim of when he returns from the shrine of the prophet. His little store for the year had, then, practically to be collected in about two days, or rather two nights, for it was not until the hour of *moghreb*, or evening prayer, or *ashâ*, about two hours after sunset, that he commenced operations. Creeping stealthily from one

rims bush or *syâl* shrub to another, he would lie in wait for some pious Mussulman who had retired a little apart from the rest for his evening devotions.

"In the name of God the merciful and gracious," says the devotee. "Praise be to God, the lord of creatures, the merciful and gracious, the prince of the day of judgment; we serve Thee and pray to Thee for help; lead us in the right way of those—" The prayer is never finished, for as he raises himself after touching the ground with his forehead, Imri's arm is twined round his neck, his *kafeyeh* stuffed into his mouth, and he is dragged off behind the nearest bush; destined, perhaps, to see the prophet in the seventh heaven, but never to visit on the earth the holy *ka'aba*.

This sort of thing had been going on for years, and although the pilgrims had often vowed vengeance, when they had once left the horrors of the desert behind, none of them ever cared to enter it again, and so Imri was still at large, and had he stuck to his legitimate business of murdering and

robbing pilgrims he might have died, if not altogether respected, at all events feared, at a ripe old age.

That day was an evil one for Imri on which he first caught sight of Zuleika, the wife of Sheikh Hassan of the Terabeen tribe. A lovely woman she must have been; all the beauties of a woman seemed to have reached their utmost perfection in her, the four things which should be wide in her reached the fullest size, including a pair of liquid, dark-brown eyes that made a man's brain dance as he looked into them; among the four things which should be small, the most conspicuous for their beauty were the little dainty feet, and among those that should be red the tempting lips, from between which peeped two little rows of lustrous teeth. These little teeth were the only things about Zuleika which were not quite in accordance with the Arab ideal of a perfect woman; white they were, and small, and beautifully formed, and as sound as the steel of the sheikh's own Damascus blade, but not quite regular. Now it was just like the perversity of human

nature that it was with these teeth, more than with anything else about Zuleika, that all the world fell in love. This very irregularity formed a pleasing contrast to the otherwise perfect symmetry of her face and figure, and set off those lovely lips in such a way, that the holy prophet himself would have thought of sin on looking at that mouth. Many a better man than Imri had been bewitched by it.

It had been a very bad season; Imri had killed only two pilgrims, and they had proved to be people of no means, and he had not the wherewithal to go to Suez to buy provisions for the summer. His old trick of accepting the hospitality of a tribe and then stealing their camels, had long since been played out, and if he wanted to steal from his own people now, he had to sneak about the outskirts of their camp, and lie in wait for stray camels or goats. It was while he was upon one of these expeditions that he first caught sight of Zuleika, attended by some of the maidens of her tribe. When Imri wanted a thing he generally set to work as quickly

as possible to get it, and it did not take him long to make up his mind that he wanted that mouth very badly indeed, but he knew well enough that the lovely Zuleika was not likely of her own free will to desert her handsome lord for an outcast like him, and that his only chance of carrying her off was to do so on a dromedary which surpassed those of all her husband's tribe in speed.

Now, of all the dromedaries in Arabia, there was none that could beat Haloueh (the sweet one), the property of Sheikh Ismail of the Beni Hammidi tribe, and Imri soon made up his mind that in order to secure Zuleika he must first get possession of Haloueh; and having once made up his mind, it was not long before he set to work to carry out his project.

It was a long march from Abumazarik to the tents of Sheikh Ismail. Over the edge of the Tih, down the Jerafeh, among the Assayideen, through the country of the Ma'azy, and then up the granite mountains to the ruins of Kerak, and scarcely a drop of water all the way. At last Imri found himself safely

hidden among the ruins. Around him were grazing the camels of the Beni Hammidi, and conspicuous among them the far-famed Haloueh. A long-legged, long-backed, fawn-coloured beast, with a thin, muscular neck, and hair as short and fine as that of a thoroughbred horse. Beside her lay a little soft-haired, fluffy ball, from out of which projected four phenomenally long legs, and a neck to match. This little ball was Haloueh's latest tribute of affection to her spouse. It was with glee that the wicked Imri saw it. He knew well the difficulties before him, and had felt more than doubtful whether, after jumping on Haloueh's back, he would be much further advanced in his vile purpose than he was before. When one jumps suddenly on to the back of a strange horse, the probabilities are that whatever else he does he will not stand stock-still. With a dromedary it is different. That animal does not kick, or rear, or run away, he simply roars, and bites, and lies down. Knowing his peculiarities beforehand, Imri decided that it was better not to get on Haloueh's back at all, but

simply to walk off with that little ball of wool. The stratagem succeeded admirably; the foal was dragged off easily enough, and, as a matter of course, its fond mother followed in its track.

All the way back to Abumazarik Imri trudged, dragging the foal, and throwing stones at the mother, to keep her at a safe distance, for she had made some very nasty snaps at him once or twice. At his home he waited for a few days to rest and make friends with Haloueh, and in this he so far succeeded that at last, by pretending to travel towards Kerak, he was allowed for the first time to get on her back. This was all that he wanted, and off he started again on his infamous errand towards the tents of the Terabeen, still leading the foal, and followed by Haloueh.

It was in a wady not far from Jabal Rahah that the lovely Zuleika was living. Imri approached as near to the encampment as he dared, and with a good deal of difficulty managed to secure Haloueh, and then, deaf to her roars and cries, led off the foal an hour's

journey to the eastward, and there tied it up to a *syâl* bush. Everything was now ready, and there was nothing more to be done but wait for an opportunity to secure that damning mouth. The chance came sooner than he had hoped. The men of the tribe were away on an expedition against the Tyaha, and were anxiously expected back. For three days Zuleika had been waiting, peering anxiously from the door of her tent, and hoping against hope that the next moment would show the form of her husband on the sky-line. On the evening of the third day, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she started off as the sun was nearly setting, to ascend a long spur of the mountain, from which a good view could be obtained to the northward. There she sat straining her eyes, now imagining that the little patches of shrub on the sky-line were a party of men on camels, then bursting into tears as after minutes of watching she saw that they did not move. Had she but looked behind her, she would have seen a long, dark form creeping stealthily towards her among the stones. Nearer and

nearer it came, but with her eyes and thoughts still fixed on the far horizon she would not have noticed it, had it advanced far less cautiously than it did.

Suddenly an arm clasps her round the neck, a handkerchief is thrown over her head, and she finds herself being carried heaven only knows where, through the fast-gathering darkness.

With her foal and her home in the same direction, there was no difficulty now in persuading Haloueh to move. Like the wind she flew with her double load. On and on she flew till, in a tenth of the time it had taken Imri to make the journey on foot, he found himself back at his old halting-place at Abumazarik. Here he could not stop; his hiding-place was beginning to be too well known. On the other hand, beyond this spot Haloueh would not move; this was the place in which she had stayed for many days with her foal, and she seemed to think that now the foal must be somewhere near. Little did she know that during the halt at Rahah her foal had furnished several meals to the fiend who

rode her. In vain Imri tried to force her off the road, at first by gentle means, then, losing his temper, by blows. At the first blow Haloueh dropped on her knees and refused to move. Then Imri, jumping off, began to belabour her with his pointed *syâl* stick, but he only hit her once. As the stroke descended on her head she raised herself from her knees, and for a moment Imri thought he had mastered her, but he was soon undeceived. Scarcely had she got on to her legs, when with one vicious grab she seized him by the arm, nor let go her hold till she had taken out a great slice of flesh. Maddened by her success, she rushed at Imri, who now ran for his life, and how bitterly he now cursed the very speed which had tempted him to steal her. Imri was a good runner, twice he avoided her teeth, then he felt a sharp pang and fell upon his face—she had caught his uplifted foot as he ran away from her, and bitten it clean off at the ankle; then, apparently satisfied with her revenge, she strode away towards her master's tent at Kerak.

Great was the astonishment of Sheikh

Ismail when his long-lost Haloueh appeared with her fair burden, who, half dead with fright, thirst, and fatigue, was at first utterly unable to explain her strange situation. As soon as he had heard her story, Sheikh Ismail set off to punish the robber. When he reached the spot where Imri had fallen, the outcast was not to be seen; but a large dark clot on the stones showed how he had bled, and a spot here and there showed the course he had taken as he dragged himself along, doubtless on his way to water. The water he had never reached, but in the dry bed of the Abumazarik lay a human skeleton from which one foot was missing, and on the hill-top sat a troop of gorged vultures. Sheikh Ismail spat on the heap of bones, and threw a stone at them, and as he rode away breathed a prayer that God might damn the soul which had once been in them, and to this day all law-abiding passers-by follow his example.

Our route lay across a succession of broad water-courses deeply cut into the chalk surface of the plateau, and bounded by high

chalk escarpments. The actual plateau is here utterly devoid of the smallest approach to vegetation, but the beds of these water-courses are pretty freely sprinkled with *rims* bushes, and the moister parts by occasional clusters of the *handâl*, or poisonous water-melon. Judging from the fact that old Mohammoud used to collect the seeds of this plant, and said that he used them to smoke in his pipe, I should imagine that they contain some narcotic. I may mention that during the whole of my journey from Suez to the Wady Jerafeh, and back to Suez by Nakh'l, I never saw one blade of grass, or any plant on which a horse could subsist. Indeed Najm assured me that every horse taken across this country required four camels to carry his food and water.

During the first two and a half days of our journey from Akabah I had noticed that all the streams flowed to the eastward, and therefore presumably emptied themselves into the Arabah. Soon after passing the Wady el Talath, however, on the afternoon

of the second day, we crossed a slight rise, and presently descended into the Wady Manjar; which, flowing in a north-westerly direction, probably found its way into the Mediterranean—a direction which was followed by all the streams I crossed until I reached the extreme western edge of the plateau, from whence the waters found their way into the Gulf of Suez.

Our camp on the 26th was pitched under a long limestone ridge called Jabal Rishar, chiefly remarkable for the extraordinary distortion of the strata of which it is composed. From this point we passed nothing noticeable till the afternoon of the following day, when we reached the Bir Abasseyeh, a large stone tank, nearly 100 yards square, which was constructed by Abas Pasha to collect water for the pilgrims on this route. Not far from it is the Ain Tamai, which is, I believe, the only natural spring upon the route. We filled our water-casks at this spring, but the water was very nearly undrinkable, so strongly was it impregnated with nitre. As the weather was very cold, I did not drink

much of it, so cannot say what effect it would produce if taken in large quantities; but as far as one's taste was concerned it was infinitely worse than the salt water of the Arabah.

For the first time since leaving Suez I found myself mounted on a really good dromedary of my own—a great lanky brute with a villainous temper, but with a great turn of speed, and as keen to go as a hunter after a long frost. It was quite a novel sensation to me to find myself on a dromedary which actually pulled, but I did not give him much chance of doing that, and after the midday halt I generally started off at a swinging trot, and soon left the rest of the party behind. It was a very pleasant sensation, to find oneself bowling along across this broad desert without another human being in sight. I have enjoyed many a good gallop across the Natal *veldt*, and that is pleasant enough; but there there is always some life, if it is only the life of the grass and the "parson" crows, and that life is just enough to mar the sensation of being for the time

utterly cut off from the world, which one gets in such perfection in this wilderness of Arabia Petræa. This shooting on ahead also had the advantage of getting me into camp long before the rest of the party, and so giving me a chance of doing a good hour's work before they came.

After passing the Bir Abasseyeh I had trotted on as usual, making occasional spurts when the ground was fairly smooth, and was rather surprised after little more than an hour's ride at catching up the baggage-train; however we were close to our camping-ground, so I pushed on and settled myself quietly under a *syâl* to work. Next morning my "sjambok" was missing, and remembering where I had sat the night before, I sent Cash to look for it, but it had disappeared. As it could not have run away by itself, I told Sheikh Louefeh that it must be found, and everybody was accordingly sent to search the ground. Presently Alyân pointed with great glee to the missing whip carefully pushed into the top of a *syâl* bush, and tried to persuade me that I had left it there my-

self. Of course the scoundrel had hidden it there in order to find it; but he seemed so delighted at his success that I had not the heart to blow him up, and presented him with sixpence for his trouble, upon which he seized my hands and covered them with kisses.

We had been marching for about an hour on the following morning, when we saw a party of Bedwin advancing over the western sky-line. On seeing us they dismounted, and, making their dromedaries lie down in a circle round them, waited our approach. This, Najm told me, is used as a sign among the Bedwin that no hostilities are intended; but, as Peacocke pertinently remarked, if everybody halted the moment he saw anybody else in the desert, it was difficult to see how they got on with their journey. The strangers proved to be the sheikh of the Terabeen and his men, and after the usual formalities of greeting had been gone through, he produced a letter from the Governor of Nakh'l to the English officer who was travelling in the desert, saying that he had received orders from Cairo to

take particular care of him, and see that he ran into no danger, and that he had sent the bearer of the letter to me with orders to place himself at my disposal, and afford me every assistance. As I was within half a dozen hours of Nakh'l I did not think it necessary to avail myself of the proffered assistance; so, after giving the sheikh some lunch, I thanked him and wished him good-bye.

About an hour after the midday halt I had pointed out to me a long chalk ridge, at the back of which I was told Nakh'l lay. Whispering *emshi* to the excellent beast I rode, off he started at his swinging trot, and the rest of the party were soon hidden under the eastern sky-line. Cash started off with me, but happening to see one of the little blue, turquoise-like stones which I have mentioned on the road, I asked him to pick it up. Pulling up his dromedary, he persuaded it to kneel down easily enough; but, once down, it steadily refused to get up again, so leaving him to be pushed up by Sheikh Lonefeh and his men, I pushed on.

As the Haj route has never before been sur-

veyed, and, as far as I know, never described, I feel that I ought to give a fuller description of it than I have done; but the fact is there is nothing to describe, the whole route lies through a succession of flat, broad, gravelly valleys, and the chalk ridges which separate them. It was across one of these valleys that my route lay this afternoon. In the foreground there was gravel, in the middle distance gravel, and in the distance chalk. What a distance that gravel stretched! After a two-hours' ride the chalk ridge which I had seen from our halting-place seemed scarcely a mile nearer. At sunset I caught up the baggage-train, and as I did not know the pass through the ridge, pulled up and travelled with them till we reached its summit. It was now pitch-dark, and through the darkness I saw two lights to the westward; the one steady and some height above the ground, the other moving about upon the plain. The steady light, said the men, came from a window in the Nakh'l fortress; so whispering another *emshi* to my dromedary, I shot ahead once more.

The light which I had seen moving about the plain from the top of the chalk ridge proved to proceed from a candle in a stable-lantern. The lantern was held by an Egyptian soldier; behind the soldier stood a gentleman in a black frock-coat, black cloth trousers, a tarbush and a shepherd's-plaid railway-rug over his head. This sort of dress did look so funny among the bare feet and flowing robes around. "Khhhhh!" I said to my dromedary, as I touched him with my whip upon his forehead. "Grooooh!" replied the dromedary in the identical voice with which his ancestors frightened all the lions out of Arabia; then whipping round with his back to the company, to show his independence, he dropped down upon his knees. The Egyptian soldier with the lantern rushed forward to prevent my falling off, which I had not the slightest intention of doing. The dromedary slowly sank first backward on to his stifles, and then forward on to his shoulders, and I stepped on to the ground. "Good-night," said the gentleman in a frock-coat, as he shook me by the hand, and introduced him-

self as Hassan Effendi Ameen, governor of Nakh'l. He had been waiting there for me since four o'clock in the afternoon, he said, and was beginning to get very uneasy about me. He then repeated the contents of the letter from Cairo, ordering him to take particular care of the English officer who was travelling in those parts; adding that he had been instructed to send off a special messenger the moment he arrived, to report his safety. As I was an English officer travelling in those parts, and it was impossible for me to say for certain that the letter did not refer to me, I thought I might as well accept the position; so, after apologizing for all the trouble that I had given him, and saying how greatly honoured I felt at the interest which the Egyptian Government seemed to take in me, I suggested that as they had waited so long, it could not hurt them to wait about two days longer before getting their news about me, and asked him if he would mind postponing the departure of the messenger for that period.

I was particularly anxious to get my

tracings, &c., safely sent home before I myself entered Egypt. Of course, knowing what I do now, this was a useless precaution; but it must be remembered that I had not heard any news for six weeks, and that when I left Egypt the English troops were under orders to embark, and for all I knew might by this time have left the country, and it was impossible to tell how far Egypt was under the influence of Turkey. The governor made a pretty speech to the effect that my wishes were his wishes, and consented to retain the messenger till I was ready.

CHAPTER XIV.

Nakh'l—Man and nature—A smart man—Sheikh Sulimman—Lively camels—A very superior person—Off the plateau—Wady el Haj—Our stowaways—A fit ending—Sheikh Aïd—Africa again.

When I arrived at Nakh'l it was of course too dark to see it, and I was too busy on the following day to look out of my tent till late in the afternoon, when I had to find time to take a photograph of the place. Like Akabah, Nakh'l was built by the Sultan Selim as a refuge for pilgrims, and, like it, it consists of a fort and a row of mud-huts, and contains a garrison of about twenty men. Beyond this, the two places have little in common. Akabah, surrounded by mountains, embedded in palms, and situated on the shores of the clear blue gulf, is a pretty place. Nakh'l is the essence of desolation. Situated

in the bed of the broad, scorched Wady el Arish (the valley of vineyards), as this dreary waste of stones is humorously called, the view on all sides is limited by low, flat ranges of discoloured chalk, and the whole prospect is about as dreary a one as one can well imagine. In the centre of the fort a deep well has been dug, and water found at a considerable depth. This circumstance, I think, points strongly to the conclusion that water might be obtained by digging in similar wadys in other parts of the desert. Round this well two trees have been persuaded to grow —the only two green things between Suez and Akabah.

If nature has blessed Akabah and cursed Nakh'l, man has tried his best to balance matters by making himself as disagreeable as his limited capacities will admit at the former, and as agreeable at the latter place. Akabah the beautiful, under Hammid Jad and his swinish crew, was scarcely bearable. Nakh'l the desolate was made what good Sultan Selim intended it to be, a pleasant resting-place, under the thoughtful care of its

governor, Hassan Effendi, and the pleasant companionship of Sheikh Suliman and his gentlemanly Tyahas.

One would naturally have imagined that the farther one went from civilization the more natural and simple-minded one would have found the inhabitants of the country to be. I found the case to be exactly the reverse. The Tawarah Bedwin whom I took from Suez were, if rather insignificant in appearance and slow in their movements, a pleasant, well-conducted set of fellows. My present companion, also living on the outskirts of civilization, came up, except in stature, very nearly to one's ideal of the free son of the desert. It was the Alawîn, separated from civilization and all its corrupting influences by a ten-days march across the desert, and remaining, to all intents and purposes, the same men with the same habits as the dwellers in their land in the days of Abraham—a tribe which, of all others, one would select as the type of the race—it was this people whom I found to be cowards at heart, thieves and beggars by profession, liars by

nature, quarrelsome by reason of their inordinate greed, dishonest and distrustful even amongst themselves, each individual the impersonation of envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, and their sheikh the impersonation of all the meanness of his tribe.

It is probably, in a great measure, to the influence of this man that the faults of his subjects are to be attributed. Imagine a London rough with a Hammid Jad as a tutor. Here is an example of behaviour of the man who rules the Alawîn.

Although the sheikh takes a large percentage of the money paid for the hire of camels, only a small proportion of animals actually belong to him. All the Bedwin are owners of camels, or, at all events, part owners of one. It is, therefore, of course, the interest both of the sheikh and his people to make the traveller take as many animals as possible. Now I had left Suez with a large stock of provisions, some of which had of course been consumed by the time I arrived at Akabah, and as I intended to return to that place, I wanted to leave several cases behind during

my stay in the Arabah, and thus save the hire of a few camels. Hammid Jad strongly objected to this arrangement. "Thirty camels you brought from Suez, and thirty camels you must take from me," he said. I heard that very much the same dispute had been going on between the sheikh and the dragoman of the geologists, the result of which was a very pretty attempt at double robbery on the part of the sheikh. "Tell my people that the Englishmen came here with only twenty camels," he said to the Sinai sheikh who had brought them from Suez; "then if they complain at their camels being overladen, I can say that they have the same loads that yours had. If you do this, I will give you ten *real* (two pounds). Then to the dragoman: "Pay me for thirty camels and only take twenty; the Englishmen will never be any the wiser, and I will give you half the difference."

On the morning of the 31st we started off again under the escort of Sheikh Suliman and his Tyahas. The ground was still of much the same nature as that over which we

had been passing, the same stony plains, and, in the distance, the same chalk cliffs; the valleys, however, were far wider, and we had not even an occasional range of chalk to cross to break the monotony of the march. The ground, too, over this route was far more devoid of vegetation than that between Nakh'l and Akabah.

Sheikh Suliman and his men, however, were all that one could wish. Cheery and obedient, never quarrelling among themselves, nor grumbling nor begging to me, it was really a pleasure to travel among these men. When I say that Sheikh Suliman refused to take a cigarette which I offered him, on the score that I was running short while he had plenty of tobacco, I am sure that any one who has travelled among the Bedwin will acknowledge that he must have been a very remarkable specimen of one. We soon became great friends, and I should have enjoyed his society the more if he had been a little less straightforward in his manner of expressing his admiration of my character. During an eight-hours' ride conversation is

apt to flag, and every now and then a long interval of silence would occur. Suddenly, *à propos* of nothing, I used to hear "*Enta forza*[1] *kathir*, *enta tyeb kathir kathir*" (you have great strength, and you are very, very good). This, I have no doubt, was all perfectly true, but still it was a little difficult to find a suitable repartee which did not savour too much of the *tu quoque*. Sheikh Suliman's son was also a fine young fellow of about eighteen. He wore a coat which, as a Mussulman's garment, was rather remarkable. A blue cloth jacket lined with fur, and having at the back a sham hood, from which depended a large yellow cross.

I am sorry to say the camels of this worthy tribe by no means shared the virtues of their masters. Not that they were bad beasts in themselves, as camels go, but the greater part of them had never been used for carrying baggage before, and most strongly objected to doing so now. On the morning after our first halt there was a regular stampede before the packs were fairly fastened, and great was

[1] *Forza* is, I believe, Italian.

the consequent smash of boxes, &c. There was one little black thing in particular, which took the whole strength of the company to load her. Nothing but tying her head firmly to her knee would keep her teeth out of harm's way, and that was no easy matter to accomplish; and even when she was once fairly loaded it was about even betting on her getting rid of part of the load before many minutes were over. Najm's steed was also rather a fiery one, and once, on receiving a friendly nip in the tail from a neighbour, gave a kick which made Najm for once remember a more expressive word than "stupid." It was the first time I had ever seen a camel kick, and I congratulated Najm on having secured an animal with so much life in it, but Najm said he preferred two and a quarter miles an hour and no tricks, and took the first opportunity of handing over his mount to a more adventurous spirit. In the midst of the daily excitement, while the loading was going on, there was one of the party who regarded the groans, roars, and antics of his comrades in haughty and

contemptuous silence. I allude to the majestic beast which it was my good fortune to ride. I do not know whether, like his master, he was called Suliman, but certainly he deserved the name. A very wise beast he was, but fearfully proud withal. There was an air of conscious superiority about that dromedary which made me feel quite shy when I approached him. He was an enormous animal, and very powerful, and, as he waited for me to mount him, his neck arched, his head well in the air, and his upper lip slightly curled, I could not help feeling that it was only by reason of his great condescension that I was allowed to place my unworthy legs across his back.

On the evening of the 1st of January we reached the western edge of the basin, and saw before us the beginning of the limestone range, and passing through this on the following morning, over a high pass, found ourselves in the Wady el Haj. This valley, so called from its forming the Suez end of the pilgrims' route, rises in the range which forms the western edge of the Tih plateau. In its

upper portion it runs in the V-formed chalk escarpments abutting on to the underlying limestone. Gradually the chalk disappears, and the valley runs between limestone cliffs, till finally it loses itself in the sand dunes which border the Suez Canal.

As we descended the valley the temperature gradually began to rise. On the plateau it had been extremely cold at night, the thermometer generally marking 29° or 30°. Indeed at this time of the year the climate of the Tih is not a pleasant one, the variation in temperature being too great and sudden. From 29° in the morning to 70° or 75° at noon was not an unfrequent rise, and this in the shade. In the sun it was often oppressively hot at noon, while a few hours earlier one had been thankful for every wrap one could lay one's hand upon. By sunset again a biting north-east wind had risen, sweeping unchecked from the frozen steppes of Central Asia.

Our last camp was among the sand dunes, about two hours' march from the canal, and by eight o'clock on the morning of the 3rd of January I found myself back once more in Africa.

We had picked up at Nakh'l two of those waifs who always manage to turn up on journeys of this sort. They correspond to the stowaways of sea-travelling, and are as hard to get rid of when once one is started. The two additions to our party were an Egyptian camel-driver, whose beast had died, and a Turkish soldier who had deserted from Mecca, and travelled with the Hajis as far as Nakh'l. A miserable creature this deserter was; half starved, footsore, underclothed in an old alpaca frock-coat and a linen petticoat, speaking no language but his own, and the butt of every one; turned away from the kitchen by the cook, and from the camp-fire by the Bedwin, shouted at by Yosîf, and pushed and kicked by every one, he was a thing to be pitied. The only person to whom he stood up at all was his brother outcast, the camel-driver, and, as that worthy considered himself to be infinitely his superior, they soon became bitter enemies.

Now I had no wish to spend a week in quarantine at Ayoun Musa, and therefore thought it advisable to be connected as little as possible with the holy but infected city of

Mecca and its inhabitants, so as we neared our last camp I told the stowaways that they must not be with us when we came to the bridge. Beyond noticing that they were not anywhere about, I thought no more about them till I arrived on the banks of the canal. There a miserable object sat moaning on the Asiatic bank, the camel-driver, who had tried to cross the night before, lost his way, and wandered about till morning without food, water, or fire. Thus he might have waited till the crack of doom, unless a caravan chanced to come that way, before the all-important, very small French official in charge of the bridge would have punted it across to save the life of one ragged Egyptian.

"Where is the Turk?" we asked.

The camel-driver, half-crying, vowed that he did not know, and that he had never seen him since he left camp. Now it is certain that they started together. I was two days at Suez, and during that time the Turk never turned up, and probably never will. Whether the camel-driver had murdered him, as the Bedwin declared, or whether they had really separated, and the Turk got lost, or

whether the Turk had tried to swim the canal and got drowned, it is impossible to say. Poor wretch! he could not have led a happy life. Miserable in his profession, and miserable in his escape from it, struggling for his life in the hands of his Egyptian enemy, dying of cold, thirst, or starvation in the dreary desert, or clutching vainly at nothing as he sank for the last time in the waters of the canal, his death was in harmony with his life.

Almost the first person whom I met on the African shore was my old friend Sheikh Aïd, who ran up to greet me and congratulate me on my safe return. He was just too late to get over the bridge which had been run across for us, and would, he said, have to wait till high tide next morning. The French officials have managed to persuade the Bedwin that the bridge can only be run across at high water, and, to give an air of truth to their statement, have constructed it so as to be as inconvenient as possible at any other time of the tide.

"It will be a bad thing for the Bedwin if this Arabah Canal is made," said Sheikh

Suliman. "This one canal is bad enough, but if we are hemmed in between two, we shall not be able to move at all."

Intellectual people will, I dare say, agree with Najm in calling Sheikh Suliman's remark "stupid;" but the fox-hunter of the midland counties who finds himself year by year more closely hemmed in by a mesh of railways, will, I hope, feel some sympathy with my Bedwin friend.

I have no doubt that the canal must be a very great nuisance to the inhabitants of the desert, and in some cases even a very serious matter. From the banks of the Suez Canal to the nearest water is a five-days' journey along the road to Nakh'l, and twenty-four hours' delay at the end of such a journey might often mean death. "But in such a case the bridge would of course be opened," may exclaim the kind-hearted reader. If he does, the kind-hearted reader does not know the small French official, and the fact that to him life, death, and the perdition or otherwise of his or any one else's soul are but small matters compared to the carrying out of the strict letter of the *règlement*.

ITINERARIES.

Number.	Date.	Name of place.	Distance from Suez. Intermediate.	Distance from Suez. Total.	Remarks.
	1883. Nov.		Miles.	Miles.	
1	17	Ayoun Musa		20	Clump of trees 1½ miles from shore. Water abundant, fairly good.
2	18	Wady Sudur	15½	35½	Stony plain.
3	19	Wady Ghurundel . . .	24	59½	Plentiful forage for camels. Fire-wood.
4	20	Wady Dâl	10½	70	Bad water for 1000 men. Fire-wood.
5	20	Sarbut el Jemal	11	81	A very barren gorge.
6	21	Wady el Ramleh . . .	25	106	Sandy valley.
7	22	Ain Barrah	18	124	Fair water for 3000 men.
8	23	Ain Arkhdah	12	136	Good water plentiful. Clump of palms.
9	23	Zebardeen Ezeraneeb. .	5	141	Stony plain.
10	24	Wady Zuleika (west end)	5	146	Forage for camels. Plentiful fire-wood.
11	24	Wady el Na'ada. . . .	19	165	Very barren stony ground.
12	25	Mouth of Wady el Ain .	10	175	Good water plentiful. Clump of palms.
13	25	Wady Elthi	13	188	Bad water (one well) for 250 men. A tributary of Wady el Ain. Road from last station through a narrow gorge.
14	26	Nawibi	19	207	Unlimited supply of brackish water. Wells 50 yards from high-water mark, east end of Wady el Ain. Palms.
15	27	Jabal Maghrubeh . . .	20	227	Road from last station along beach good.
16	28	Wady Ta'abah	22	249	Brackish water plentiful. Palms. Very rough road over mountain pass from last station.
17	29	Akabah	8	257	Unlimited supply of brackish water. Fort with accommodation for 600 men. Scanty supplies for men. The Alawin Bedwin possess 5000 camels.
	Dec.		From Akabah.		
18	3	Ain Defeyeh	12	12	A muddy pond. Water fair for 4000 men.
19	4	Ain Ghudiân	14	26	Very salt water for 8000 men. Fire-wood.
20	5	Wady Musaib.	11	37	Valley covered with sand-hills.
21	6	Ain Ghurundel	7	44	Good water (muddy) for 2000 men.
22	6	Wady Th'ah	4	48	Fire-wood plentiful.
23	7	Wady Lehyaneh. . . .	7½	55½	,, ,, ,,
24	9	Wady Jerafeh	15	70½	,, ,, ,,
25	10	Wady Jeraideh	7	77½	,, ,, ,,

Return Journey.

Number.	Date.	Name of place.	Distance from Akabah.		Remarks.
			Intermediate.	Total.	
	1883, Dec.		Miles.	Miles.	
1	24	Wady el Haserat . . .	6½	6½	Deep rocky gorge. Very barren. Good road. Might easily be made passable for wheeled conveyances.
2	24	El Kantara.	4½	11	A substantial stone bridge, 30 feet wide.
3	25	Wady Abumazarik . . .	18	29	A flat-bottomed valley, 5 miles wide (stony).
4	26	Wady Manjar	14	33	Water collects in considerable quantities after rain.
5	26	Jabal Rishar	11	44	Remarkable hill, with contorted strata.
6	27	Bir Abasseyeh	11½	55½	Large stone reservoir. Water impregnated with nitre.
7	27	Wady el Aryt.	8	63½	Water probably by digging. Succulent plants.
8	28	Nakh'l	27½	91	Stone fort. Capable of holding 600 or 700 men. Plentiful water (good). Two date palms.
9	30	Wady Abukanadu . . .	16	107	Broad stony plain. Very barren.
10	31	Wady Haritan	19	126	Road from last station across barren stony plain.
11	Jan. 1	Wady el Haj	7	133	Narrow winding gorge. Good road.
12	3	Suez	38½	171½	Road from mouth of Wady el Haj, through sand hills. Canal crossed by a wooden swing bridge. Inconvenient at low tide.

No forage for horses is to be obtained on this route. The route by Nakh'l is practicable for wheeled conveyances throughout its length.

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